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Master's Thesis of International Studies

Moulding Mothers: Political Motherhood in South Korea between 2007 and 2016

**몰딩맘: 2007 년부터 2016 년간 대한민국의 정치적
모성에 대한 연구**

August 2019

Graduate School of International Studies

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Abstract

Moulding Mothers: Political Motherhood in South Korea between 2007 and 2016

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The South Korean fertility rate has been decreasing since the 1960s and hit its lowest point in 2018, with a fertility rate of 0.98 babies per woman. Many women cite reasons such as job instability, high costs associated with childrearing, the unfair distribution of household tasks, and gender inequality as the main reasons for postponing childbirth. As a low fertility rate causes numeral problems for a nation, most notably for the economy, the Korean government has been trying to raise the fertility rate through numerous policies. Since 2005, Korean maternity policies have been expanded massively, especially in the field of childcare subsidies. However, these policies are so far not effective, and many people criticize these policies for not promoting an image of motherhood that matches the expectations and requirements of future mothers themselves.

The policies employed by the government to shape motherhood and the image they convey is also characterized as *political motherhood*. Political motherhood moulds the experience women have as mothers, as it sends out explicit and implicit messages about the duties of motherhood. This present study explores Korean political motherhood by analysing policy documents from 2007 until 2016. This is done using a Critical Frame Analysis, which uncovers the policy frames present within these documents.

This study found three main frames within the policy texts. Firstly, the Korean government focuses a lot on the *Reconciliation* between work and family, by implementing programs to enable women to re-enter the labour market after giving birth. Secondly, most policies are made with a *Focus on the Labour Market*. Finally, there is a lot of attention on offsetting the *Economic Burden* that many prospective parents see as a cause for postponing childbirth. Interestingly, there was an extreme lack of *Gender Equality* within the policy frames. Both the problem-setting and the offered solutions in the form of enacted policies do not tackle the issue of gender inequality, even though many scholars do see it as a cause for the low fertility rate. Furthermore, women were the main receivers of the policies; men are not seen as part of the family policies, which suggests that the government sees the low fertility rate solely as a woman's problem.

The research concludes that by not addressing gender inequality within its policies, the Korean government shapes motherhood by sending out implicit messages that promote a traditional family structure where the woman is the main caretaker and the man the main breadwinner. Furthermore, it puts added pressure on women by forcing them into the labour market, without actually addressing one of the main causes for labour market-exit for women: the unfair distribution of household tasks. Therefore, Korea's political motherhood can be characterized as gendered familistic political motherhood. The government should realise that part of the reason its policies are not effective is the complete lack of policies that target gender inequality.

Keywords: South Korean fertility rate; Policy framing; Political motherhood; Fertility; Family Policies; Work-family reconciliation

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the South Korean fertility rate and birth rate have plummeted. With a current fertility rate of 0.98 children per woman, the fertility rate is far below the replacement level of 2.1 (Yonhap 2019). A fertility rate this low, especially over a prolonged time like in Korea, is detrimental to the country. At the current rate, Korea is set to become a super-aged society in 2026 (Bang 2018), which will harm the economy immensely. The dependency ratio of social benefits-receiving citizens to working-age individuals will shoot up to 100:100 by 2060, and the pension fund is estimated to be depleted by 2057 (Miller 2018; Yonhap 2018).

Commentaries often speak of a “Birth Strike” (South China Morning Post 2018). Korean women are not inclined to give birth anymore, due to unfavourable social and economic conditions. Reasons often cited in interviews and online news articles are the high expenses to raise a child, high unemployment, long working hours, lack of work-life balance, unequal distribution of household tasks, and gender inequality (South China Morning Post 2018). “Among OECD countries, South Korea ranks third-highest for number of hours worked, first for highest gender wage gap and last in terms of time men spend caring for their children” (Brunhuber 2018).

Understandably, the government is trying frantically to raise the fertility rate. Since 2006, the government has proposed three Basic Plans for Low Fertility and Aged

Society. These plans are 5-year plans that outline the desired policies by the government. It has also, every year since 2007, published comprehensive documents showing which policies have actually been implemented. Policies range from cash incentives to have more children and money to cover medical treatments during pregnancy to benefits for childcare and extended parental leave. Although there is a delayed response to government policies, the fertility rate has shown no improvement and, in fact, has even decreased further since the start of the First Basic Plan. Also, some of the policies and programs have generated criticism or even created a backlash, for example Park Geun-hye's infamous "Birth Map" (Choe, 2016).

Often cited in interviews with Korean women, is that the government's policies do not actually tackle the main reasons why women do not want to have children and are thus very ineffective. "The government policies are based on this simplistic assumption that 'if we give more money, people would have more children'," the Korea Women Workers Association said in a statement (SCMP 2018). Other commentators mention that the government's policies are not really created for the benefit of women. Rather, "the government sees birthrates just as a woman's problem," according to a representative of the Korean Justice Party Han Chang-min (Sposato 2017).

"Making South Koreans make more babies isn't just about more funding or better access to subsidized childcare—it's about changing 'the societal image [of motherhood] and the pressure keep women shackled to her child'" (Poon 2018).

However, the government policies over the last few years have not contributed to changing this image. Rather, as this research will show, the government policies invoke the traditional image of a woman having the main caring duty, whilst the man is the main provider.

It is important to know what kind of an image policies create, explicit or implicit. The “package of measures deployed by the state to mould mothering” is also conceptualised as *political motherhood* (Borchorst 1990, 160). Examining political motherhood is important as firstly, practically, it influences the responsibility mothers have for their children directly and secondly, ideologically, “the degree of child care provision by the state is deemed to send out implicit and explicit messages about the duties of motherhood” (Windebank 1999).

However, academic research on image-creation through fertility rate-boosting policies is lacking. This proposed thesis aims to contribute to this field by applying a *Critical Frame Analysis* to policy documents between 2007 and 2016 to see what kind of an image of motherhood is created through South Korean population policies. The central question of this research will be: what messages about the duties of motherhood is the Korean government conveying through its birth rate-boosting policies between 2007 and 2016? In answering this question, this research will also examine how these policies are framed, whether there has been a notable change throughout the years and what Korean political motherhood means for the effectiveness of these policies. Even

though this is not a policy recommendation paper, with the results from the analysis, some careful policy recommendations will be offered as well.

2. Background

Before diving into scholarly work on the low birth rate in Korea, its causes, and family regimes, it is important to first discuss some definitions and trends that can be observed in Korean society relating to the low birth rate. This chapter will provide the background necessary to understand scholarly discussions which will be described in chapter 3. Firstly, the definition and difference between the terms birth rate and fertility rate will be discussed. After that, this chapter will discuss trends related to the Second Demographic Transition in Korea, such as the declining fertility rate, increase in age at first marriage, and the ageing population. Finally, this chapter will discuss the evolution of family policies in Korea since World War II and the state of current family policies.

2.1 Definition

Up until now, there has not been made a clear distinction between birth rate and fertility rate. To clarify, these two are indeed different. The birth rate is the rate of births within a specific time frame. The fertility rate, or TFR, is more complex, as it encompasses how many children a woman can give birth to during her lifetime. It is seen as a sign for population growth. As per December 2018, the birth rate in Korea is 6.4 births per 1,000 people and the TFR is 0.98 (Yonhap 2019). Both numbers are estimated to drop further in 2019. Because the concepts are interlinked, birth-rate-boosting policies are thus also fertility rate boosting policies and vice-versa, as the

state does not make a clear division in its policy documents. Thus, birth-rate-boosting policies and fertility-rate-boosting policies will be treated the same. In the remainder of this proposal, I follow each respective author's choice of words when talking about these rates.

2.2 The Second Demographic Transition

It is vital to discuss some characteristics of the Second Demographic Transition in order to understand the current low fertility rate in Korea. The Second Demographic Transition is often mentioned by scholars when talking about Korea's current population problems. The First Demographic Transition refers to declines in mortality and fertility from the 18th century onwards. The endpoint of the First Demographic Transition would have been an older population with replacement fertility, which means no population growth. However, as witnessed after World War II, this did not happen. Rather, fertility dropped sharply below replacement levels. The population is estimated to decline. Traditional living arrangements (e.g. marriage) would become scarcer (Lesthaeghe 2014; Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa 1986).

Korea exhibits a lot of the characteristics of the Second Demographic Transition. As mentioned, Korea's fertility rate hit a record low of 0.98 in 2018 and its crude birth rate has decreased to 6.4 births per 1,000 people per year (See figure 1). This brings the total number of newborns to 326,900 in 2018, which is down 8.6 per

cent compared to 2017 (Yonhap 2019). These numbers present record low numbers for Korea when it comes to its fertility and birth rate. Korea, together with Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong, is often dubbed an “ultra-low fertility society” as its fertility rate has fallen below 1.3, which is also called the “lowest-low fertility rate” (Ochiai 2013, 119-120).

Falling fertility rate

Unit: average number of babies that a woman is projected to have during her lifetime



Figure 1: TFR during the last decade. Lee 2019.

The fertility rate has been decreasing for quite a while already. In the 1960s, the Korean fertility rate was still around 6 children per woman, but it has been dropping steadily ever since (See figure 2). With the help of strong anti-natalist family policies by the Park Chung-hee government, the fertility rate dropped to the replacement level of 2.1 in 1983 (Eun 2011, 88). The rate continued to drop even further, as the government did not yet abandon its aggressive family policies. However, even after the government changed its stance on the fertility rate in 1989, the rate kept on falling even further, accelerated by the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. In 2005, Korea hit a fertility rate of 1.08 births per woman, making South Korea the country with “the lowest fertility in the world” (Eun 2011, 93).

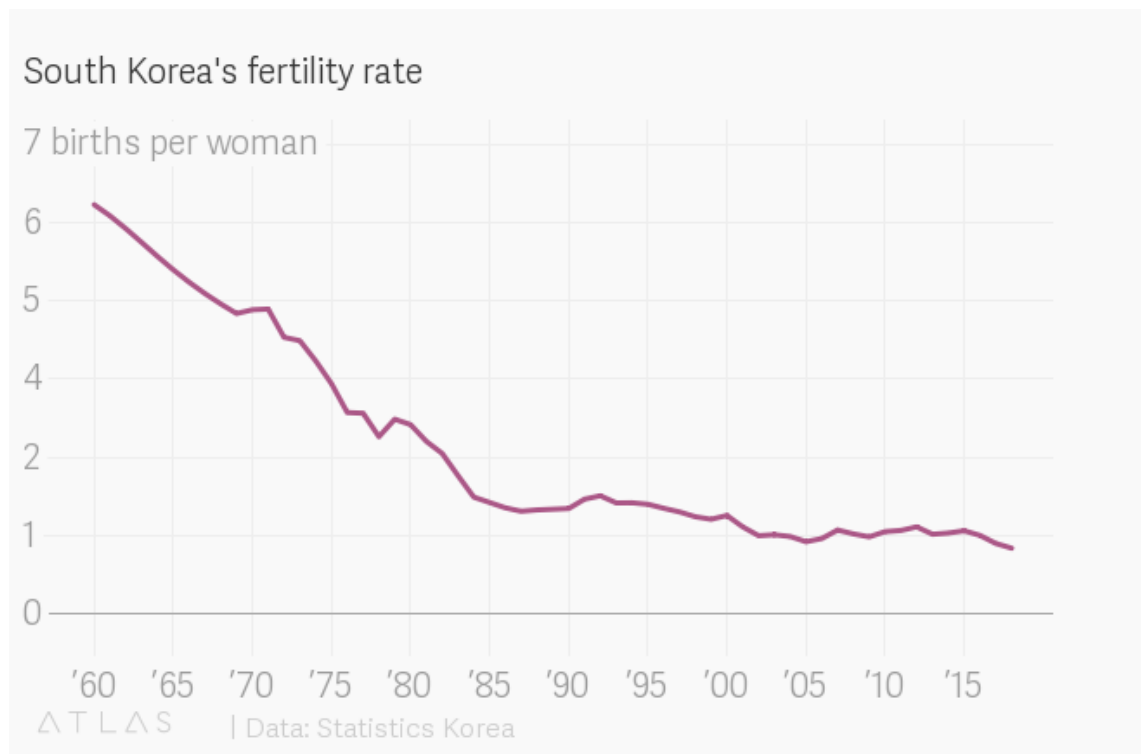


Figure 2: South Korea's TFR since the 1960s. EchoHuang 2019.

A trend that accompanies the decreasing fertility rate, is an increase in the age at first marriage. It is often seen as a direct cause for the decrease in fertility. As South Korea has an extremely low rate of out-of-wedlock births (Ochiai 2013, 126), an increase in the age at first marriage leads to a lower fertility rate. Only in 1995, the average age of first marriage for women was 25.4 and 28.4 for men, compared to 30.0 years and 32.6 years in 2015, respectively (Korea National Statistics Office 2016, 392).

According to Ochiai (2013), there has not been a clear increase in cohabitation or births out of wedlock for people in Asia, which has also been cited as the major difference with the European Second Demographic Transition. According to her research, South Koreans seem to be the most conservative in their outlook on cohabitation and births out of wedlock, compared to people from Japan or Hong Kong. This has accelerated the fertility decline even further.

Besides this, Korea is now also an aged society (See figure 3). Having become an ageing society in 2000, meaning that the elderly constitute more than 7% of the population, Korea became an aged society only 17 years later in 2017, with an elderly population over 14%. (Kim 2017, 335) It is set to become a super-aged society in 2026: the fastest transition in the world (Hankyoreh 2018).

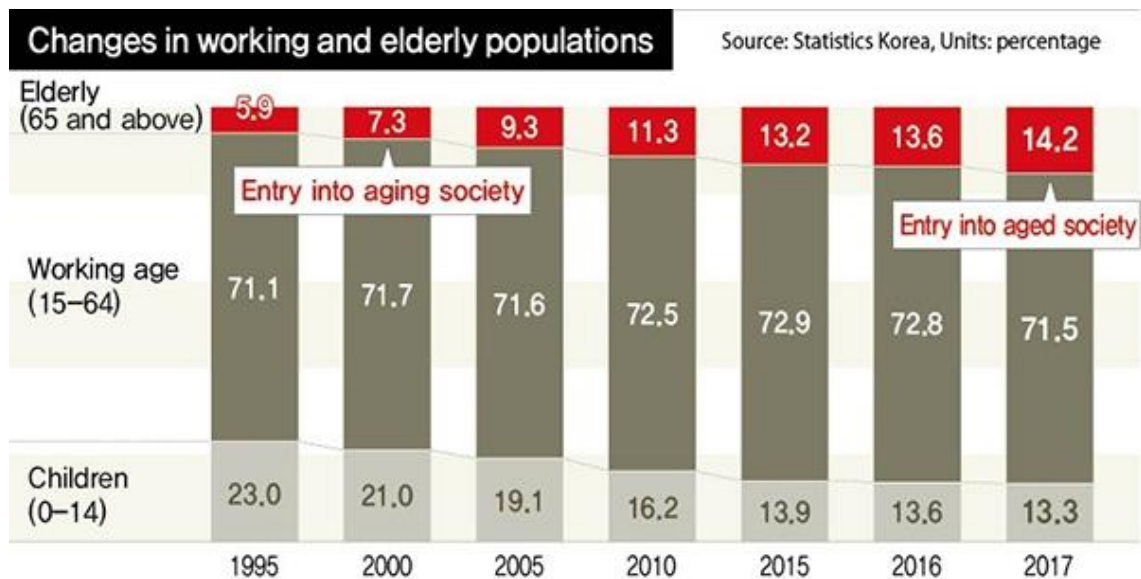


Figure 3: Korea's entry into aged society. Bang 2018.

2.3 Family Policies in South Korea

Korea has a complex history when it comes to family policy. For a long period, up until the early-2000s, the Korean government hardly intervened in the private sphere. Due to a strict Confucian heritage, the Korean government only had basic family policies in place. This changed after 2003 when the government started seeing the low fertility rate as a societal problem and it established the Presidential Committee on Ageing Society and Population Policy in 2004. This section will provide an overview of the evolution of family policy in South Korea during the last century. It will also provide an overview of the current state of family policies in Korea.

2.3.1 Evolution of Family Policies

Korea has a complex history when it comes to family policy. Lee D. (2018) identifies three distinct periods. Firstly, 1945-1988 was characterized by limited family intervention and strong Confucian values. The second period (1988-2003) saw an emergence of family policies, but still within the Confucian framework. The final period (2003-2016) shows an “explosive expansion of family policies” as the Korean government realizes that the declining fertility rate will pose problems for Korea in the future.

In Korea, the family has long served as the main social security network. The government did not take responsibility for social issues such as old age, maternity, and sickness until after the Korean War. This is due to the strong Confucian influence on Korean culture, according to most scholars (Holliday and Wilding 2003). Confucian values such as filial piety and family obligations have placed a strong responsibility on individual families to look after their own welfare and have placed a weak responsibility on the state. Social welfare was thus not necessarily seen as a task of the government nor as a social right (Holliday and Wilding 2003; Jones 1993).

Under this minimal welfare structure, Korean family policies after the Korean War have often been described as embryonic. This means that family policies were limited and implicit. The government did not assume a strong role when it came to

childcare facilities or elderly care. There was only limited monetary support for social groups. The Korean government only provided subsidies to families in social institutions, families without breadwinners, and families of soldiers and policemen who had died in the line of duty (Lee, D. 2018, 47).

At this time, Korea still had a high fertility rate of around 6 children per woman. The Park Chung-hee government saw the country's high fertility rate as a major obstacle to Korea's economic development, which led to the establishment of the Korean Family Planning Program (FPP) and the Planned Parenthood Federation Korea (PPFK) in 1961. The FPP directly aimed to decrease the fertility rate by supplying contraceptives and information about them (Lee, D. 2018: 48). This was very successful, and the fertility rate dropped rapidly. It is important to note, however, that this was not only due to the government programs. The society had "already required the preconditions for reducing fertility levels" by the time the government started enacting its policies (Finch and Kim 2016, 135). Too many children were seen as a hardship by Korean families, so the government's policies resonated well with a population that was already seeking to decrease family size.

Family policies during this first period as categorized by Lee were characterized by minimalist intervention and a strong focus on traditional family values. Examples of such policies include, but are not limited to, the establishment of maternity leave, state allowances for families of limited means and the dissemination

of information about contraception. Not included were childcare or care for the elderly. As can be observed through family planning posters, the Korean government focused heavily on contraceptive measures, abortion and sterilization (Turnbull 2012). “The state (...) worked closely with the PPFK to change the public perception of birth control, establishing a department of public relations in 1970 to make the idea and practice of contraception familiar to the populace” (Moon 2005, 81-82). Effectively, the Korean state was pursuing a one-child policy, even after the fertility rate dropped below the replacement level in the 1980s.

In the 1980s, the Korean government diverted its attention to the heavy gender imbalance at birth as well. As can be observed from government posters and slogans such as “Having one well-raised daughter is no less than having ten sons,” the Korean government aimed to tackle the culture of son-preference that had been prevalent in Korea, and many East-Asian countries, for centuries (Turnbull 2012).

With the advent of the Roh Tae-woo government (1988-1993), Korean family policies got expanded, leading to what Lee characterizes as the second period in the evolution of Korean family policies (Lee, D. 2018, 49). The Roh government acknowledged that there were many “incomplete families” such as single-parent households, elderly households or young families (Lee, D. 2018, 49). Allowances for these families were expanded. More importantly, childcare policies were formally established. The government started seeing childcare and care for the elderly as its

responsibility and established more child care facilities and the Infant Care Act, to name but a few. The PPFK was still focused on providing contraception but on a lesser scale. One of the main concerns of the Korean government and PPFK was gender equality between children within families and classrooms. After the 1997 Financial Crisis, the government started observing an even sharper drop in fertility levels, causing concerns about the fertility rate for the first time.

In the third distinct period of welfare policies, a stark rise in family policies can be observed. The governments of Roh Moo-hyun and Lee Myung-bak started seeing the low fertility rate as a threat to the future of Korean society and family policies became a major focus of the Korean government. No longer was the goal to limit family size. Instead, the campaigns focused on the exact opposite: raising the fertility rate. In 2005, the government announced three basic plans to raise fertility levels. These programs have profoundly expanded child care facilities, have led to more allowances for vulnerable families and, for the first time in Korean family policy history, have also paid attention to encouraging work-life balance (Lee, D. 2018, 51).

During the period researched in this paper, three different governments have been in charge of making the family policies (see chapter 4). The Roh Moo-hyun government, centre-left, followed the steps of the previous centre-left government and expanded childcare policies even more during his reign between 2003 and 2007. The childcare budget expanded fourfold, and he introduced the “basic subsidy:” covering

half of the private childcare costs of every child under the age of 2 (Fleckenstein and Lee 2014, 620). Female employment was also promoted under his reign. Although previously the expansion in family policies was due to feminist influence, Fleckenstein and Lee argue that the expansion under President Roh was mainly to appeal to younger voters. Furthermore, “The government made fertility a political priority on the national agenda by establishing a presidential committee” (2014, 620-621).

With the ascension of the conservative government in 2008 (which would last until the end of the period studied here), led by Lee Myung-bak and later by Park Geun-hye, a lot of people expected the family policies to be scaled down again. However, even the conservatives carried on with expanding the policies, with the most radical change being the expansion of childcare benefits to every child aged younger than 5 for low- and middle-income families, which doubled governmental childcare expenditure. This pro-family policies stance of the conservative party was mainly due to the great loss it had suffered ten years earlier, which had transformed the party’s leadership and values. Prominent female politicians lobbied for family policy supporting work-family reconciliation. However, it is important to realize that both within the central-left governments and the conservative governments, “the greatest progress was made in areas where employers did not show fierce resistance” (Fleckenstein and Lee 2014, 622). So, the most expansion was within tax-funded childcare policies rather than policies that actually changed gender relations or other societal structures.

2.3.2 State of Current Family Policies

Current Korean family policies can be categorized into 3 broad categories: health family policies, work-life balance related policies and multi-child family policies. Health family policies are the most prevalent policies in the policy documents, focusing on maternal health during and after pregnancy, and on the children's health. The Framework Act on Healthy Families, passed in 2004, was one of the first major laws regarding family policies and signifies a crucial change for the Korean government, as it assumes a stronger responsibility for social welfare (Chin et al. 2011, 57).

Some health family policy examples for mothers are cash benefits for women with high risks pregnancies, free folic acid and iron powder for pregnant women, subsidies for IVF, and nutritional education. Some health family policy examples for babies and young children are support for diapers and formula, support for medical expenses of premature babies, support for vaccination, and support for regular health checks.

Work-life balance related policies have improved a lot since the mid-2000s. Their foundation is the Act on Equal Employment and Support for Work-Family Balance, which became effective in 2008. It not only focuses on gender equality within the workplace, but it also aims to improve the work-life balance of families. It can

basically be divided into two different sections: policies related to maternal and paternal leave and policies related to childcare.

Examples of policies related to leave are extended paid and unpaid maternity leave, the establishment of paternity leave after the birth of a child, parental leave for children under 6, and the reduction of working hours for working parents. Leave policies have gone through quite some developments over the last few years. Especially paternity leave, established only in 2008 as 3 unpaid days, has improved a lot. According to 2016 documents, fathers can take paternity leave after the birth of their child for 3-5 days, of which 3 paid. Maternity leave is currently 90 days, of which at least 45 days after childbirth. Both parents are allowed to take parental leave to take care of their child, but not simultaneously, and the allowance is 40% of the wage. Examples of policies related to childcare are childcare subsidy and on-site childcare.

Multi-child family policies aim to promote bigger families. As such, they mainly provide tax incentives to families that have more than three children. Examples of these types of policies are a higher loan limit for families with more than three children, scholarships for families with more than three children, discounts on tax, and discounts on electricity bills.

The child policies as described above have several limitations. The most-often heard complaints, which are also acknowledged by the Korean government, are:

limited availability of childcare, subsidies for multi-child families starting from 3 children, limited amount of paternity leave, employers not honouring the 90 days maternity leave and pressuring mothers to resume activities beforehand, and strong cultural pressure which leads to hesitation when asking for parental leave (MK 2015; Chin et al. 2011, 55-59). Currently, the centre-left government of president Moon Jae-in is aiming to expand policies even further, by extending more childcare subsidies and starting campaigns to promote gender equality. These, however, falls outside of the scope of the current study.

3. Literature Review

This chapter will discuss the academic background for the present study. In order to find out the implications of the image of mothering that is created by the government, a few key research areas and researches have to be discussed. These researches together form the theoretical framework for this thesis. Firstly, this chapter will discuss existing studies on fertility rate and fertility rate decline in general, making mention of two of the major literature reviews on fertility rate studies from the last few years. Secondly, this chapter will focus on the causes of the declining fertility rate in Korea specifically with a special focus on the influence of policy. Finally, this chapter will discuss the different type of welfare regimes and the main theoretical component of this thesis: political motherhood.

3.1 Causes for low fertility

There has been a lot of research already on fertility rate and birth rate dynamics, including a few comprehensive literature reviews in this particular field. Firstly, Balbo et al (2013) have produced a comprehensive review of fertility studies in advanced societies. They divide the research done so far in three categories: micro-level determinants of fertility, meso-level and macro-level.

Micro-level determinants of fertility are categorized as the different factors that influence an individual/couple's decision whether to have children or not. Researched

variables in this context are, for example education, economic conditions, partnership and family origin. Meso-level determinants focus on social relations. Researchers look at interpersonal relationships, place of residence and the social network to see how fertility is influenced. Finally, macro-level determinants are comprised of the broader cultural and institutional setting in which couples seek to have children. Economic trends, social policies and welfare regime types are all examples of macro-level determinants.

Thus, Balbo et al. show that there are many different factors influencing fertility and the choice of whether to have children or not. This is underlined by Mills et al (2011), who also research reasons for declining fertility rate. They start from the assumption that the main reason for the declining fertility rate is postponement of bearing the first child. The ‘postponement transition’, which is described in more detail by Kohler et al (2002), Goldstein et al (2009) and Sobotka (2004), refers to a massive delay in childbearing across Europe and Asia.

Mills et al. see the main reasons for postponement as the introduction of contraceptive technology, educational level and field of study, women’s labour force participation, ideational shifts, gender equity, partnerships, and economic instability. As both Mills et al. and Balbo et al. are literature review-based researches, they give a good overview of the current state of fertility rate-related studies. They also show how vast and wide the research is. Many different factors play a role in determining why the

birth rate in a given country has declined during a given period. Most factors are also strongly interlinked and should not be considered separately.

3.2 Low Fertility in Korea: Causes and Explanations

It is important to mention that although many studies touch upon causes for the low Korean birth rate, research presenting a thorough overview of these causes is lacking. Rather, most studies highlight one or two causes of the declining birth rate and elaborate on why and how these particular causes contribute to the decline. Popular media sources as well provide a rich source of potential causes for the low birth rate, which often overlap with academic sources. For that reason, some (credible) news articles are mentioned in this part of the literature review as well.

3.2.1 Causes of Low Fertility

As to why the birth rate and fertility rate have declined in Korea specifically, many different factors are named. All scholars agree that the direct cause of lower fertility in Korea is marriage postponement but cite various reasons as to why marriage is being postponed. As is often mentioned, Korean women are on “birth strike” (South China Morning Post 2018). The extreme costs of childbearing and -rearing, inequality when raising children and job insecurity are often mentioned as reasons by Koreans themselves to not have children, especially in online articles.

Reasons for the decreasing fertility rate can be categorized into two categories: cultural-social factors and socioeconomic factors. As for the cultural-social factors, often mentioned as a major cause for the low fertility rate in Korea is its strict Confucian heritage. With core values of hierarchy and patrilineality, traditional Korean culture assumed a traditional family model of a male breadwinner and a female caregiver. Women were expected to take care of not only the children but also the elderly. It is often said that these traditional values still pressure women today into taking care of the children. It is still expected from many women by society, their family, and their husband that they give up their career and stay at home to take care of the child (Den Boer, Hudson 2017: 125-128).

Furthermore, Korean society is currently still quite unequal. “Among OECD countries, South Korea ranks third-highest for number of hours worked, first for highest gender wage gap and last in terms of time men spend caring for their children” (Brunhuber 2018). Women are at the heart of the work-life dilemma, because not only is there a huge wage gap (women earn 65% of what men earn), they are also much more likely to leave their jobs to take care of the children. Korean women have become aware that in the current society, having children means giving up their own career and self-development (Kim 2017). What can be seen from statistics is that there is a large percentage of Korean women that drop out of the labour force after age 30, due to childcaring responsibilities, also known as the M-curve (See figure 4). Furthermore, according to a recent study by The Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs,

Korean women spend 7.5 times more time on domestic labour and 3.5 times more on child care than their husbands in a dual-income family (Kim 2019). The unbalanced and gendered distribution of unpaid household tasks thus contributes to the decreasing fertility rate.

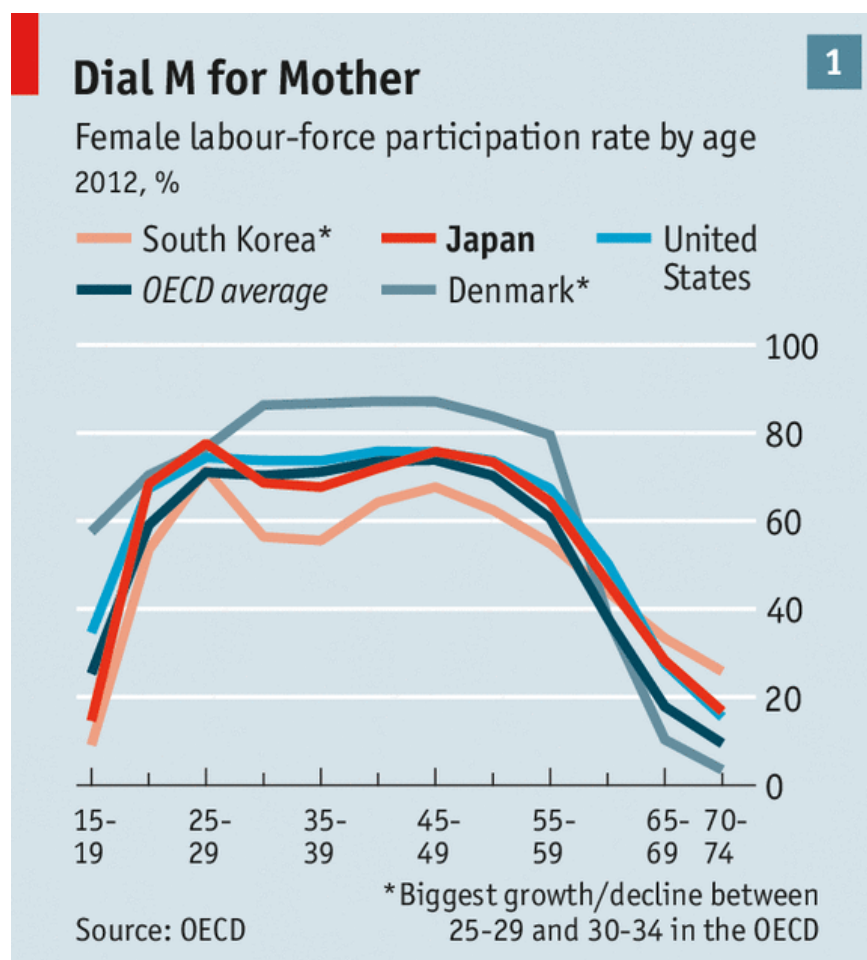


Figure 4: The M-Curve. Kawabata 2014.

As for socio-economic reasons, labour market insecurity is also a major cause of the declining fertility rate (Kim 2005: 13). Unemployment amongst youth has been rising since the 1990s (Finch and Kim 2016, 135). Part-time jobs have also become more frequent. Furthermore, due to the strict Korean work culture, having children is not encouraged by companies. It is not appreciated for men and women to take parental leave after a child is born and the burden is often solely placed on women.

Another often-cited reason for the low fertility, mainly by young Koreans themselves, are high costs associated with childrearing. Not only the costs for a child's education are high, but also the costs of housing, groceries, childcare and other facilities are often too high for young families to afford, especially if the woman has to quit her job (Finch and Kim 2016; Brunhuber 2018). Combined with uncertainty about their jobs, Korean couples opt to not have children and avoid these costs. Furthermore, childcare facilities are often not a great option, as the quality or the availability is lacking, despite government efforts (Lee 2015).

Education can also be seen as a separate cause for the declining fertility rate. Korean society as a whole is very focused on education and career and as such, Education plays a major role in the decreasing birth rate, according to some scholars (Sorensen 1994: 12). Two mechanisms are at work. Firstly, the increased level of education has influenced the age of marriage. As marriage is still a prerequisite for children in Korea, if marriage occurs later, fewer children will be born. Secondly, the

increasing focus on education leads to higher educational expenses for parents. In order for your child to succeed in life, cram-schools and shadow education are needed. These are very costly and could dissuade potential parents as well (Choe, Retherford 2009: 270).

To sum up, the reasons for low fertility in Korea can be broadly categorized into two sections. Cultural-socially, the strict Confucian heritage on and gender inequality in Korean culture are often cited as reasons why women are less inclined to have children. Socio-economically, unemployment and high costs of childrearing facilities are mentioned. Insecurity related to money matters and gender inequality in the family and workplace is often cited by Korean themselves as reasons for postponement or of having no children in news articles.

In other words, childbearing has been suppressed because families, and especially women, are having a hard time reconciling the contradictions between the demands of the labour market and the cultural expectations that mothers have to be full-time caregivers. Even though the 2008 Financial Crisis has led to more young mothers being in the workforce (Eun 2011: 100), this contradiction still puts a lot of pressure on future mothers. Furthermore, for those women in the workforce, good quality childcare is scarce.

3.2.2 Theoretical Explanations

Kim (2005) offers a traditional explanation of the recent fertility decline (See figure 5). He separates Korean fertility decline into two stages. The first fertility transition, from 1960 to 1985, was largely due to migration and family planning programs, whereas key causes of the second fertility transition are labour market insecurity, family formation, and gender equity orientation. He argues that changes in family formation - e.g. later marriage and higher divorce rate - are influenced by labour market insecurity, socioeconomic changes, globalization and gender equity orientation.

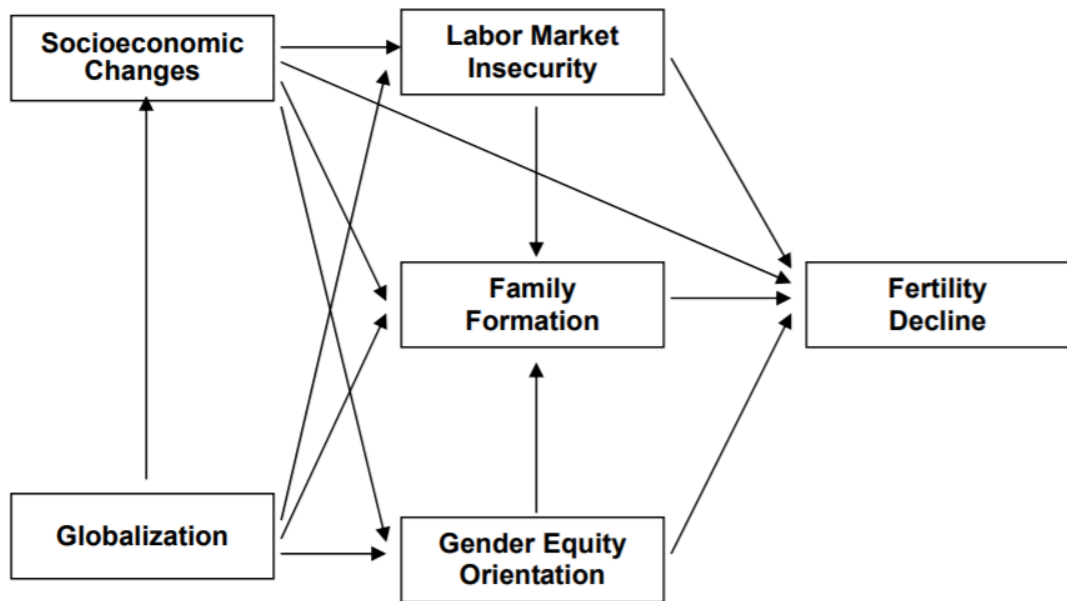


Figure 5: Traditional model of fertility decline. Kim 2005.

Eun (2003) gives a different explanation and describes two models to explain the declining fertility rate in Korea. The first model, dubbed the *Traditional Model* sees the proximate determinants of fertility as marriage, contraception, and abortion and the underlying sociological factors, such as the ones mentioned above, as the underlying causes. This model is very similar to Kim's model (See figure 6).

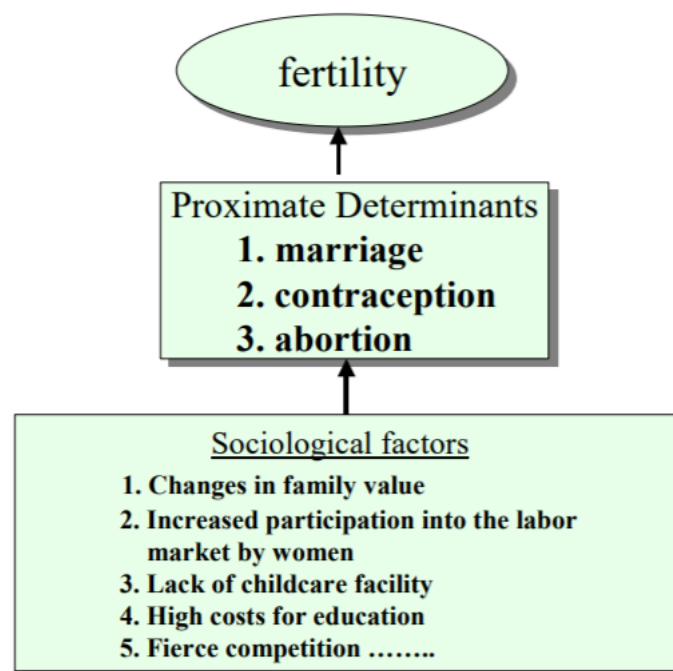


Figure 6: Traditional model of fertility decline. Eun 2003.

However, according to Eun, this traditional model is not sufficient to explain the rapid changes in Korean family values and the rapidly declining birth rate. He argues that the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 contributed greatly to these changing family values and explains why the fertility rate made a sharp drop during 1995-2000. Eun shows that fertility amongst married women did not decline as sharply as the total

fertility rate. This means that the decline in fertility rate is, even more than thought so, strongly related to marriage postponement.

Eun proposes another model, which focuses on the contribution of job insecurity and labour market flexibility, as the main drivers of the declining birth rate (See figure 7). These factors influence youth and adults differently, in that it dissuades the youth from getting married, and it persuades adults to get divorced.

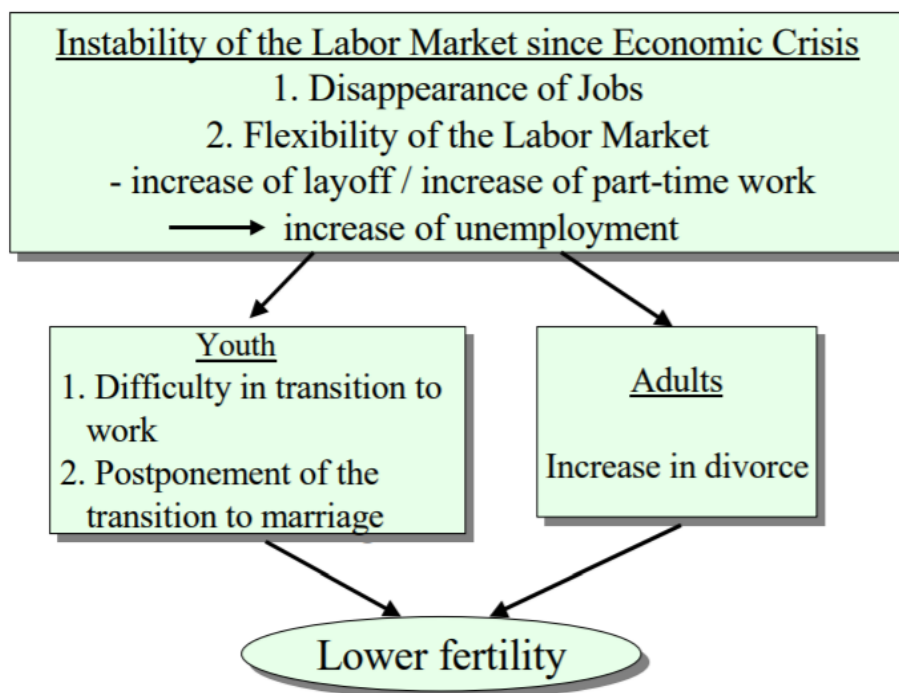


Figure 7: Alternative model of fertility decline. Eun 2003.

Anderson and Kohler (2013) take a quite unique approach, in that they see educational expenses as the main reason for Korean fertility decline. They argue that “(f)amilial traditionalism and gender inequality are not particular to Korea” and can also be found in other countries, such as in Southern Europe, and therefore these factors are not the main cause for the recent sharp fertility drop (202). “Thus, what separates Korea from low-fertility countries in the West, similar in economic development and familial structure, is the steadfast parental drive to produce super-educated, competitive children.” (Anderson and Kohler 2013, 210).

3.3 Policies

One factor that has remained suspiciously absent from the preceding description of causes of the low birth rate is the influence of policies on the fertility rate. The main reason for this is that it is extremely hard to measure the influence of policies on birth rates due to time lag, but also because it is hard to isolate which particular policy influenced the fertility rate. Policies are usually mentioned as a factor that have some sort of influence over the birth rate, but to what extent is hard to determine.

It is often mentioned that policies to reduce the fertility rate are more effective than policies to raise it (Haub 2010). Policies to decrease the birth rate such as increasing the use of contraception and sterilization have a greater effect on the birth rate than policies to increase the birth rate such as cash benefits and longer parental

leave. However, it is extremely hard to measure in which way a certain policy influences the birth rate. “A specific policy cannot be seen in isolation, and its effect in another context might turn out to be completely different from that where it was first introduced” (Anderson 2005, 8-9).

Glowaki and Richmond (2007) have tried to do some research on which kinds of policies influence the birth rate the most. Within the United States, they use a fixed effects regression model to determine which policies influence the birth rate the most. Their results show that compensation has the largest result on childbirth amongst the researched variables. In contrast, parental leave has a negative effect on childbirth the longer it gets (Glowaki and Richmond 2007, 35-37). However, their research does not show to what extent the policies actually influences childbirth, and whether the influence found is solely due to the policy or other surrounding factors (environmental, societal) as well.

Lee (2009) attempts to see the effect of pro-natal policy on the Korean fertility rate. Although he does admit that “[i]t is really difficult to measure the effect of policies on fertility change, specifically after a short term of their implementation, since many factors including policy have intermingled effect on fertility” he attempted a simple logistic regression on policies between 2005 and 2008 to see effects. He concludes that policies for establishing the health and nutrition system for mothers and children, policies for increasing the compatibility between works and home, and

monetary support for costs of childcare and pre-school education have a positive effect on the fertility rate. However, he does not explain whether that is solely due to the policies or other environmental/societal factors, nor does he describe the causal relationship between those policies and the fertility rate.

As it is so hard to prove the effectiveness of policies on the birth rate, this thesis will not attempt to do so. As is mentioned in Mills et al (2011), it is hard to measure the impact of social policy on childbearing postponement. Most research done is either on the individual level or cross-national (Balbo et al 2013, 19). It is hard to determine whether a policy is actually effective due to time-lag, endogeneity and isolation issues. Welfare policies are thus often treated in a descriptive way, showing changes over time within a certain nation, or they are one variable in an individual-choice study (e.g. Lee, D. 2018, Fleckenstein and Lee 2012).

3.4 Welfare Regimes

Most research argues that you can divide modern welfare regimes and family policies into two or three categories. Drew (1998) sees two different categories. If a state's social policies support traditional family structure where a man works and a woman takes care of the child, it is typed a familistic gender regime. On the contrary, individualistic gender regimes treat both partners equally and support both partners working. Korpi (2000), however, categorizes differently. Three ideal-typical models

are distinguished. Firstly, the general family support model presumes that the wife has the primary responsibility of childcare and works as a secondary earner. The dual-earner support model encourages both partners' labour force participation. Finally, the market-oriented gender policy model assumes that market forces play a central role.

Korea is often perceived as traditional welfare regime, which favours a traditional family structure of a male breadwinner and a female caretaker. Fleckenstein and Lee (2014, 618) characterize Korea as a mix of a conservative and liberal welfare regime. It is seen as conservative in the sense that its Confucian heritage places a strong emphasis on the family and traditional family structure. However, as the government did not interfere a lot in the family sphere, rather leaving it to the families themselves, Fleckenstein and Lee perceive Korea's welfare regime as liberal as well.

Central in these kinds of studies on the Korean welfare regime is how state policies impact women's experience on mothering, particularly in regard to labour market participation and gender relations. As mentioned in the introduction, the "package of measures deployed by the state to mould mothering" is also conceptualised as "political motherhood" by Borchorst (1990, 160). Differently said, the actions the state undertakes to raise the birth rate, such as providing childcare, providing subsidies for young families, and implementing programs to reduce the work-life incompatibility, influence how a woman experiences being a mother. Windebank (1999) has defined two reasons why political motherhood is important.

Firstly, practically, it influences the responsibility mothers have for their children directly. Childcare measures, for example, directly influence how much a woman has to take care of her child. Secondly, ideologically, “the degree of childcare provision by the state is deemed to send out implicit and explicit messages about the duties of motherhood” (Windebank 1999, 2; see also: Brannen & Moss 1991; Fagnani 1992). Through the degree which the government provides childcare, healthcare subsidies and other programs which aim to help mothers, it sends out messages about what a mother is supposed to do to be a good mother.

There is one study on political motherhood in South Korea, by Won (2006). In this study, political motherhood in South Korea, up until 2004, is subject to a functional analysis. Won analyses state policies in terms of accessibility, affordability, and the quality of service provided. This research argues that until 2004, the state has taken up more childcare responsibilities, but it still minimizes state intervention. “In other words, Korean political motherhood depends on family solidarity rather than state intervention” (129).

This study by Won focuses mainly on childcare and thus the practical side of political motherhood. Moreover, as this study was finished in 2006, it does not encompass the recent changes in the state’s family policies. Therefore, Won still characterizes the Korean state as minimally interventionist, whereas since then, it has stepped up its game entirely. Most studies on political motherhood focus on the

practical influence it has on mothers' lives. They research mainly how the degree of childcare provided influences a mother's access to the labour market (Windebank 1999; Won 2006). Research into the ideological side of political motherhood, namely how a state's policies contribute to the perception of motherhood, is quite lacking. This proposed research will aim to contribute to this field, not by researching what ideological influence Korea's policies have on mothers, but by researching which images these policies convey. This will be done through Critical Frame Analysis, which will be expanded upon in the following chapter.

4. Data & Methodology

This chapter will discuss the methodology and data used in this research. Critical Frame Analysis, as described by Verloo (2005a), will be used to expose the frames present within the policy documents. Critical Frame Analysis allows the researcher to identify trends within a policy discourse in terms of images created. The data used largely comes from two different kinds of sources. Firstly, the three Plans for Low Birth Rate and Ageing Society are 5-year plans that outline the governments proposed measures. Secondly, policy documents from 2007 until 2016 displaying actual policies carried out in a specific year will be used as well.

The main question this research will aim to answer is: what messages about the duties of motherhood is the Korean government conveying through its birth rate-boosting policies between 2007 and 2016? In answering this question, this research will also examine how these policies are framed, whether there has been a notable change throughout the years and what Korean political motherhood means for the effectiveness of these policies.

4.1 Methodology

In order to test what kind of an image the government is creating through its birth rate boosting policies, this research adopts Critical Frame Analysis as its primary method. Critical Frame Analysis allows the researcher to identify major trends in policy

documents and employs trends from social movement theory, public policy, and gender theory.

A frame is identified as an interpretation scheme that structures the meaning of reality (Goffman, 1974). Frames originate in both the discursive and practical consciousness, as actors can explain why and how they are using them – the discursive consciousness – and they often originate in routines and rules without the actor being aware of it – the practical consciousness (Giddens, 1984). However, frames do have concrete and material consequences. Gadamer (1960) explains frames through the existence of prejudices. Through prejudices, an actor's reality gets formed with an (unknown) socio-cultural bias. In the context of policies, this translates into a policy that might be more gender- or race-biased than people realize.

Verloo (2005b, 20) defines a policy frame as an “organising principle that transforms fragmentary or incidental information into a structured and meaningful problem, in which a solution is implicitly or explicitly included.” Verloo identifies two key dimensions of a policy frame: diagnosis (what is the problem?) and prognosis (what is the solution?) (Verloo 2007, 33). Technically, the prognosis should match the diagnosis, so that solutions are actually tailored towards the particular problems they aim to tackle. Frame analysis can help show whether the diagnosis and prognosis actually match, by seeing if the underlying frames match. Furthermore, policy discourses give implicit and explicit roles to different actors. In other words, policies

convey implicit and explicit messages as to who holds the problem, who causes it, and who holds the key to the solution.

This research uses the same questionnaire as used by Verloo and the MAGEEQ Project (see Appendix 1). The MAGEEQ Project was launched in 2003 by the European Union under the name “Policy Frames and Implementation Problems: The Case of Gender Mainstreaming.” Its main objective was to research gender equality in EU policies. MAGEEQ has developed a set of ‘sensitizing’ questions, which will be employed in the current study to research policy frames in Korean policies. The main focus lies on four categories, as described by Van de Graaf and Hoppe (1992) and Verloo (2005a). The first category researches which actor speaks at which point and to which audience. The second category of diagnosis describes what is the problem, why is it a problem and who has caused the problem. The third category of prognosis analyses the solution to the problem. Finally, the fourth category analyses the call for (non-)action: who should act and who is acted upon (Roggeband and Verloo 2007, 274).

One of the greatest potentials of Critical Frame Analysis is that it identifies the “conceptual prejudices” that unintentionally shape policy discourse and how policy is received. It can even reveal gender bias and inconsistencies between the diagnosis and the prognosis (Verloo 2007, 37-38). Furthermore, it can show exclusions of certain groups from either the diagnosis or prognosis as “discursive strategies can modify the

process itself by means of excluding some actors from the debate” (Triandafyllidou and Fotiou 1998, 6.4). A major limitation is that it does not show why these frames have emerged and how. Other methods are needed to tie a certain policy frame to its political context.

With all interpretive methods, such as other forms of content analysis, subjectivity is seen as one of the major pitfalls. How to remain subjective when analysing policies that have originated in a certain country, especially if the researcher is not from the country, as is the case in the current study. How will you analyse objectively what a text is saying, without writing down what you *think* the text is saying? A common tactic to combat subjectivity is the use of a second reader. As the present study does not allow for this, the best way to minimize subjectivity is to stick to the MAQEEQ questions as strictly as possible, using short descriptions of frames. Furthermore, this research will also look at comments on these policies by the groups it targets. Using online opinion pieces on the policies and 5-year plans, it can see whether the frames it found are also present within the criticisms of these policies.

4.2 Data

The data analysed can be categorized into 2 main categories: the 5-year plans and policy documents (See figure 8 for a summary and Appendix 2 for a comprehensive overview). Firstly, the Korean government has been publishing comprehensive 5-year

plans to combat the low fertility rate and ageing society. The First Plan for Low Birth Rate and Ageing Society (제 1 차 저출산 고령사회기본계획) covers January 2006 until December 2010. Currently, only a summary of this plan is available. As the present research focuses on fertility rate, it will disregard the sections about the ageing society in this plan and only look at three different sections: a summary of the low fertility rate, the causes of the low fertility rate as perceived by the government, and the proposed measures to raise the fertility rate. This will be used for identifying frames in the problem diagnosis.

The Second Plan for Low Birth Rate and Ageing Society (제 2 차 저출산 고령사회기본계획) covers January 2011 until December 2015 and is also called Saeromaji Plan 2015 (새로마지 플랜 2015). The full version is available online and includes the same parts as in Plan 1 - summary, causes, and proposed plans - but also includes an evaluation of Plan 1. Once again, this research will focus only on the sections about the fertility rate.

Finally, the Third Plan for Low Birth Rate and Ageing Society (제 3 차 저출산 고령사회기본계획) covers January 2016 until December 2020 and is also called “Bridge Plan 2020” (브릿지 플랜 2020). It is very similar to the Second Plan in terms of sections, except that it misses a clear “causes of low birth rate” section. Therefore, the causes will be read from the context of this plan. As my research covers

the years 2007 until 2016, this last low birth rate plan has only been effective during the final year of this research.

The policy documents researched range from 2007 until 2016. Sadly, the policy documents for 2005 and 2006, when the First Plan came into power, are not available, so those years are not part of the current study. The documents are published by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in the fall and provide an overview of the changes in the birth rate during that particular year and enacted policies with regards to raising the birth rate. The policy documents until 2013 are called “Population Policy” documents (인구정책). From 2014 onwards, the documents are called “Birth Encouragement Policy” documents (출산장려정책). The documents divide the policies by Central Government policies (중앙정부) and Local Government (지방정부) policies. This research will only focus on the Central Government’s policies, which are used for researching the frames present in the prognosis of the problem.

This research will ONLY look at policies dubbed *Maternity* policies by the government, meaning that it will only research those documents that have been presented by the Ministry of Health and Welfare as birth-rate boosting policies. Obviously, other policies that are not within these documents influence the birth rate as well. A notable example of this are policies to raise employment amongst the youth.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, employment instability is one of the major factors that influence the birth rate, so policies influencing employment indirectly influence the birth rate as well. However, as those policies are not directly presented by the government as birth rate boosting policies, they will not be analysed as such.

| Administration | 5-Year Plan | Policy Document |
|----------------|---|-----------------|
| Roh Moo-hyun | The First Plan for Low Birth Rate and Ageing Society | 2007 |
| Lee Myung-bak | | 2008 |
| | | 2009 |
| | | 2010 |
| Park Geun-hye | The Second Plan for Low Birth Rate and Ageing Society | 2011 |
| | | 2012 |
| | | 2013 |
| | The Third Plan for Low Birth Rate and Ageing Society | 2014 |
| | | 2015 |
| | | 2016 |

Figure 8: Overview of data analysed.

5. Analysis

The frame analysis of the policy texts and 5-year plans has shown major frames and minor frames. Major frames are frames that are very common in both the diagnosis and the prognosis and can be found throughout all years. Minor frames are fragmented and less clearly elaborated in both sets of documents. This research found three major frames: reconciliation, focus on the labour market, and economic burden. The minor frames that were found: demographic issues, shortcomings of existing policies, and changing society. The frame of equal opportunities is given special consideration. Change over the years is also discussed.

5.1 Major frames

The three frames mentioned below are all extremely interwoven, so it is quite difficult to say which frame is most prevalent. As it is hard to count frames, due to the nature of this qualitative research, it is difficult to say which frame is most important.

Reconciliation is a very steady frame, with little changes over the years. *Focus on the Labour Market* is present throughout all documents. *Economic Burdens* seems to be the most common frame in the prognosis-related documents.

5.1.1 Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a common frame found in both the diagnosis of the problem and the prognosis and pertains to problems relating to reconciling work with family and private life. In the 5-year Plans, problems of work-family reconciliation are often mentioned as one of the main causes of the reduction of the fertility rate. The 5-year plans articulate that work and family life can often not be combined by women. The First Plan describes the M-Curve and how women often stop working after giving birth. The cause of this is not clearly mentioned, however, until the second 5-year plan. The Second Plan clearly states that existing institutions towards reconciling working and childrearing is to blame for this inability to reconcile family and work: “사회의 제도와 인식부족이 결과적으로 여성들에게 일과 결혼·출산 중 선택을 요구.” The Third Plan, however, does not mention any cause for the inability to reconcile work and family life, it just mentions it as one of the major problem areas for families that need to be addressed by policy.

All of the plans, however, stress how the inability to combine work and family is mainly the woman's burden. Men are hardly mentioned as problem-holders. The Second Plan, and the Second Plan only, also mentions how the unequal sharing of unpaid care work in the form of household tasks is a major cause for the inability to reconcile work and family life. The burden of childrearing is placed mostly on women, due to the lack of male participation and excessive working hours that do not promote

work-family reconciliation: “여성에 편중된 과도한 육아부담도 여성의 출산 의지를 저하시키는 요인 - 남성의 가정내 육아와 가사참여가 부족하고 과도한 근로시간 등 가족중심의 사회여건이 충분히 조성되지 않아 출산에 따른 부담이 여성에게 편중.”

In the policy documents, work-family balance is always addressed as one of the main policy areas and it receives its own policy category every year. Policies range from improving maternity leave and getting mothers back to work, to better childcare facilities and cash benefits for companies hiring mothers. Women are the focus of the policies and are thus acted upon. Paternity leave was first addressed in 2008, but other than that men are hardly mentioned within this category. From 2014 onwards the policy documents make a separate mention of men, rather than talking about parents, when talking about parental leave. The documents mention that if a woman takes parental leave first, if a father takes leave for the same child afterwards, he can get 100% of his wage and vice versa. Even though this is used as an example, and this rule applies to both mothers and fathers taking leave *after* their spouse, the fact that it is worded in this way places emphasis on the mothers taking leave, rather than on the fathers “엄마가 육아휴직을 사용한 후에 같은 자녀에 대해 아빠가 육아휴직을 사용하면, 아빠의 첫 1 개월 육아휴직 급여로 통상임금의 100%(최대 150 만원) 지원(엄마, 아빠 순서가 바뀌어도 동일, 아빠의 달).” From 2009 onwards, the policies also introduce more reintegration programs for women to get

back into work and offer cash benefits to companies rehiring women after they have given birth. The cash rewards are not sizeable, however.

If the sharing of duties and responsibilities between women and men in the sphere of intimacy is addressed, it is located in diagnosis but hardly translated to the prognosis. In other words, policies to tackle reconciliation problems do not address the imbalance of unpaid care work within a household, even though this was perceived as a problem by the Second Plan. As the years pass, the reconciliation policies become more generous towards both men and women, but the relation between them is not addressed. The reconciliation policies are mainly targeting women, who are acted upon. Furthermore, the reconciliation policies mainly focus on getting women back into the labour market and do not address the other part of the work-family equation, namely, imbalanced division of unpaid housework tasks.

5.1.2 Focus on the Labour Market

Focus on the Labour Market is a second common frame. It ties in closely with the *Reconciliation* frame as that frame also shows underlying attention to the labour market. When looking at the diagnosis of the problem, employment stability is always mentioned as one of the main factors of the declining birth rate. Both the First and Second Plan discuss youth unemployment and employment instability as one of the major factors behind the decline in marriage, and ultimately, fertility rate. The Third

Plan sees youth unemployment as one of the biggest problems for the fertility rate. The focus is mainly on the employment of both men and women as there is no mention of a particular gender in the unemployment problem-setting.

However, when looking at the work-family balance problem, which is both part of the *Reconciliation* frame and the *Focus on the Labour Market* frame, we do see a heavily imbalanced gender focus. This particular diagnosis focuses mainly on the unequal entry of women into the labour market, explaining their exit through the M-curve. The focus is on the long-term absence of women from the labour market. This particular facet is also translated to the prognosis. Youth unemployment issues are not really touched upon in any of the birth plans; the main focus is on getting women back to work, through “Mommy integration programs,” cash incentives and other measures. Women, in this sense, are seen as a tool for the economy. Their own interests are not taken into account in this frame.

What is extremely interesting when looking at the *Focus on the Labour Market* frame, is how the diagnosis does not translate in an adequate prognosis. The problem of unstable employment and high unemployment is elaborately described by all three Basic Plans, but no clear measures are introduced within the maternity policies. The only translation we see is geared towards getting mothers back to work *after* giving birth, whereas the diagnosis stresses job instability *before* birth. So, basically, whereas the problem stresses both genders, the solution only focuses on getting women back to

work. Furthermore, the prognosis only focuses on women who are already not unconditionally available for work because of care duties. The lack of equal opportunities is hardly discussed at all.

5.1.3 Economic Burden

The third major frame, *Economic Burden*, is strongly present across all years, in both the diagnosis and prognosis. This is interesting on its own, as this frame is not even remotely present in similar studies on European countries. This frame refers to the fact that many Koreans believe getting children is too expensive, and ties into *Focus on the Labour Market* as well.

In the diagnosis of the problem, economic burdens are always seen as one of the major reasons for the declining birth rate. The First Plan focuses on childcare expenses as the main economic burden, stressing that they are often seen as too high and thus a major obstacle for getting children. The Second Plan is a little vaguer and separates childcare infrastructure from other economic burdens. It mentions that parents see the financial burden of raising their children as the biggest reason for avoiding childbirth, “부모들은 자녀양육에 소요되는 경제적 부담을 출산기피의 가장 큰 이유로 제시.” Apart from childcare costs, this plan also mentions housing and education as two major costs. The Third plan also focuses on education and

childcare expenses, but, as with the other two frames, does not elaborate upon these causes.

This frame is most present in the prognosis. All policy documents have mentions of tax breaks, housing policies, childcare subsidies and other economic measures to lower the economic burden. In 2007 the policies focus heavily on tax incentives. In fact, 5 out of the 6 policy categories focus on providing monetary incentives, with one category specifically dedicated to tax incentives alone. From 2008 onwards, the special 'tax' category has disappeared, but the heavy focus on easing the economic burden is still present. Although not discussed in the diagnosis of the problem, every single policy document has a category for compensating maternity-, pregnancy- and birth-related expenses. Other categories focus heavily on providing housing incentives, extra money for childcare, and support for multi-child families and families with disabled children. Interestingly, until 2011 there is also extra financial support for rural families.

The *Economic Burdens* frame is prevalent in both the diagnosis and prognosis and does not really discriminate based on genders. Most financial incentives go to the family as a whole, except for the ones that are specifically for women that are conceiving, pregnant or giving birth.

5.2 Minor Frames

There are also several frames that were found occasionally in the Basic Plans and Policy documents. Although not as articulated or widely used, these frames are still worth discussing.

5.2.1 Demographic Issues

One commonly found frame is the *Demographic Issues* frame. This is mainly found in the diagnosis of the problem rather than the prognosis. It sees the declining birth rate as endangering the population. It is usually articulated along the lines of social security, in combination with an ageing society. As all three Basic Plans are also focused on combatting the ageing society and problems associated with this, a connection between the birth rate and the ageing society is indirectly implied.

Basically, the diagnosis states that due to the decreased number of births, Korea will not be able to get enough input into its social security network for it to function in the long run. This is the major argument implied in all three Basic Plans. The First Plan mentions that the decreased birth rate will lead to a reduced productive population and rising average working age. The Second Plan elaborates on this statement and delves deeply into the economic effects of the reduced birth rate. The Third Plan links the decreasing birth rate and increasing ageing society even closer together by not making separate sections when discussing these phenomena and their

causes. The problem is not really articulated along nationalistic lines (e.g. declining strength of nation), the focus is mainly on the economic consequences.

The logical prognostic match is to stop the demographic decline. Although there are obviously more ways to do this, for example through changing immigration policies, these documents all focus on raising the birth rate instead. This implies that children and women giving birth are being seen as functional, as tools to stop the demographic decline and 'save' the economy.

5.2.2 Shortcomings of Existing Policies

Another frame that was often found in the diagnosis but not in the prognosis, is *Shortcomings of Existing Policies*. Almost all Basic Plans have a section dedicated to previous family policies or the previous plan. This section sums up why these policies were (not) implemented and why they have failed. Often mentioned causes for the failure of previous policies are lack of public support for these policies, poor childcare infrastructure, and cultural limitations.

The Second Plan only spends one page describing the shortcomings of previous and existing policies. The limitations are described in a very general manner, no specifics or examples mentioned. For example, one of the limitations of the First Plan, according to the Second Plan, is that the policies only tackle specific areas,

instead of tackling bigger societal problems as a whole. It gives the example of the heavy focus on childcare. The Third Plan describes the shortcomings in more specific terms. For each major policy consideration (i.e. work-life balance, high costs of childcare, etc.), it gives specific limitations of previous policies (e.g. coverage through the national health insurance is not sufficient “건강보험 보장성 미흡, 고위험 산모·신생아 증가로”).

What can be observed in the *Shortcomings of Previous Policies* frame is an overall generality. The shortcomings are articulated along very general lines and no real solutions are offered. This frame can only be found in the diagnosis of the problem and is not translated at all to the prognosis. Furthermore, within this frame, there is no reflection upon whether the policies, both proposed and implemented, address the actual causes of the low birth rate. The failure of the policies is mainly found in societal attitude or infrastructure problems. The government is not often at fault, nor is there any reflection on whether the policies actually target what should be targeted. There is no discussion on how family policies themselves should be approached and improved.

5.2.3 Changing Society

A third minor frame found, which is rather hard to discern, is that of *Changing Society*. Once again, this frame was found mainly in the diagnosis of the problem and

especially strong in the First Basic Plan. The First Basic Plan clearly mentions two causes for the low birth rate that are related to changing societal and family values: changes in attitude on marriage and changes in attitude on childbirth. According to this plan, 71,4% of unmarried men and 49,2% of unmarried women is positive towards marriage. The report also mentions a change in attitude towards childrearing due to a change in attitude on family succession and economic matters.

Overall, the First Basic Plan is very vague when describing causal relations. Both how these societal changes cause a lower birth rate and how these changes came to be are not described at all the report. Furthermore, as fewer women are, according to the report, positive towards marriage than men, slight blame is placed upon women for these changes. The Second Plan also mentions that a changing society contributes to the decreasing birth rate but is even vaguer in how society has changed and why. It mentions that policy has to focus on alleviating economic burdens and promoting work-family balance over the long run to consistently tackle these issues “사회문화 및 가치관 변화와 연관된 인구정책의 특성상, 저출산·고령화 대책의 효과가 나타나기까지는 장기간이 소요, 지속적이고 일관된 정책수립이 필요.” “다양한 요인들의 복합적 작용 결과인 저출산 현상에 대해, 경제적 부담 완화, 일-가정 양립 강화, 가치관 변화 대응 등이 적절히 어우러진 정책 조합을 구사.” The Third Plan once again mentions the change in attitude on marriage as the key to the declining birth rate. It actually goes into depth as to why marriage has declined over

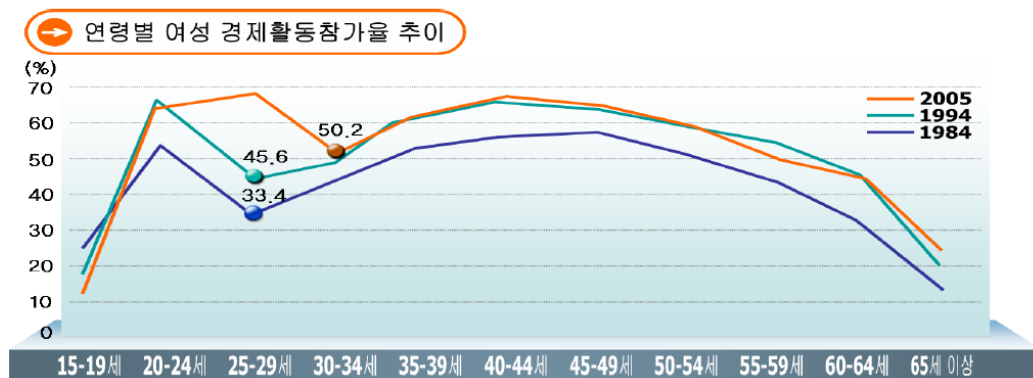
the last years, mentioning the high costs of weddings, but does not explain the difference in numbers between men and women (61,5% for women and 50,5% for men when it comes to marriage deferment).

A thorough analysis of these societal changes is missing across all basic plans. All of them do mention that a changing society contributes to a declining fertility rate, but causality is not explained. There is thus also not a properly matching prognostic frame. Closest would be policies providing family support and support for newlyweds, but as the problems are not adequately defined, the solutions do not match very well.

5.3 Equal Opportunities

A frame that deserves a separate section is the *Equal Opportunities* frame. This frame is present throughout all the years but is very hard to piece together due to its broad nature. This frame encompasses issues ranging from gender equality in the workplace and gender equality at home to equal opportunities in the labour market. As such, this frame actually consists of two parts: *Gender Equality* and *Equal Opportunities*. It touches upon other frames, such as *Reconciliation* and *Focus on the Labour Market* as well. In other cases (e.g. Verloo 2007), this frame is articulated most strongly in the prognosis and rather sketchy in the diagnosis. In the Korean case, however, the opposite is the case.

In the diagnosis, gender imbalance is often mentioned as one of the major causes of the low birth rate. The First Plan only focuses on equal opportunities, mentioning how women often drop out of the labour market after giving birth, but not going into depth as to *why* they drop out of the labour market (See figure 9).



* 자료: 통계청, 「경제활동인구연보」, 각 연도

Figure 9: The M-curve. First Plan.

The Second Plan also mentions this particular reason for childbirth postponement but also touches upon the unequal division of house labour: “여성에 편중된 과도한 육아부담도 여성의 출산 의지를 저하시키는 요인 - 남성의 가정내 육아와 가사참여가 부족하고 과도한 근로시간 등 가족중심의 사회여건이 충분히 조성되지 않아 출산에 따른 부담이 여성에게 편중.” The Third Plan once again focuses mainly on the job market as the place for inequality and unequal opportunities. Interestingly, although many scholars (and news articles) mention gender imbalance and inequality as one of the major reasons for childbirth postponement, this is not really translated into the analysis of the three Basic Plans.

Rather, the three Plans observe that inequality exist, without providing a thorough analysis of its causes and potential solutions.

This pitfall can be clearly seen in the prognosis of the problem. Gender equality is not addressed in a separate policy category. It is usually only mentioned under the header of “work-family balance” and as such focuses mainly on equal opportunities on the labour market. Some examples of policies would be providing companies with cash benefits when they rehire women after giving birth, integration programs for new mothers, and better childcare leave.

What can be observed in both the diagnosis and the prognosis, is that gender often means women, rather than both men and women. It is presented that women have to catch up with men in the labour market. Male norms, both at work or at home, are not touched upon. The *Equal Opportunities* frame is thus, although presented as such, not about equality, and more about what women could and should do to catch up with men.

The problem of gender equality is never at the heart of family policies. Although it is (sparingly) mentioned in the diagnosis, it is hardly found in the prognosis and always part of a bigger frame. This shows that gender equality is not seen as a reason to draft or review family policies. It is seen as an indirect problem, that affects other issue areas that are more important to the Korean government, such as the labour market. Given the high presence of the *Labour Market* frame, it is obvious that the government sees that as more of a priority than gender equality.

5.4 Changes

Both the diagnosis and the prognosis documents go through quite some change over the ten years researched. During this period, there were three different presidents. Roh Moo-hyun from the Democratic Party ruled from February 2003 until February 2008, followed by Lee Myung-bak from the Conservative Party who ruled from February 2008 until February 2013, and Park Geun-hye, also from the Conservative Party, who ruled from February 2013 until she was ousted in March 2017. As the majority of the policies was made by a Conservative-led government, it is hard to pinpoint any political influences.

Nevertheless, some changes can be observed. Officially, all three Basic Plans have a different focus, which has been predetermined around 2005. The First Plan was supposed to foster environments in favour of childrearing, mainly through financial support for childcare and healthcare. The Second Plan aimed for the “steady recovery rate” of the fertility rate by focusing on the consolidation of work-life balance. Finally, the Third Plan was supposed to increase the fertility rate to the OECD average (Lee 2009, 63). However, little of these predetermined themes can be discerned from the actual plans themselves. The diagnosis of the First Plan indeed mentions the high costs of children as one of the major causes that need to be addressed by policy, but, interestingly, it also places a heavy focus on changing societal values. It seems to be

placing the burden largely on women when talking about these changing values.

However, it does not address gender equality as a cause in any way.

In contrast, the Second Plan does not mention these changing values at all. It has a heavy focus on economic causes and the inability to combine work and family life, which corresponds to its original goal. This plan is also the only plan that mentions how gender imbalance, mainly within unpaid housework and the labour market, contributes to the lower birth rate.

The Third Plan on its own is very interesting. In a huge contrast to the First and Second Plan, it does not have a separate section for the causes of the low birth rate, as it now sees it as a “societal trend”. It asserts that the previous two plans have failed, so the causes have not changed and do not need to be addressed separately: “1·2 차 기본계획 추진에도 불구하고 세계 최저수준의 출산율과 급격한 고령화 속도를 고려할 때, 정책적 대응은 여전히 미흡하다는 평가.” So, the only way to see what the government perceives as the causes of the low birth rate for this plan is to look at which specific areas they aim to target. Once again, there is a heavy focus on finance-related factors, such as childcare expenses and housing. There is also the focus on the work-life balance, but also, for the first time, the government says that the social responsibility for raising children should be strengthened. This “social responsibility” (사회책임시스템) mainly refers to healthcare.

As the policy documents are published every year, it is easier to see and discuss changes. The first policy document from 2007 is actually radically different from the other ones. The policies focus heavily on providing financial support, incentives, benefits or any other kind of financial compensation for childbearing and -rearing. These policies are categorized into six categories, of which five focus on financial support. This document hardly mentions men in its solutions. Men are only indirectly mentioned when talking about parental leave, paternity leave has not been installed yet.

In the years that follow, the policy documents all have a similar structure. They usually divide the policies into 4 or 5 categories, namely pregnancy and maternity support, childcare support, work-family compatibility support, multi-child families support, and various family support (which encompasses support for newlyweds, for children with disabilities, for adoption, etc). Although men are still largely absent from the policies, paternity leave is implemented in 2008. However, besides paternity leave and parental leave, men are never the receiver of the policies and thus, in the eyes of the government, never the solution-holder.

Interestingly, although a lot of researchers mention how immigration and the acceptance of multicultural families could help boost the birth rate, multicultural family policies are largely absent and only appear in the 2012 and 2013 documents.

From 2013 onwards as well, paternity leave and parental leave is expanded in terms of days and monetary compensation. Furthermore, as the years go by, policies aiming to reduce the incompatibility between work and family life become larger both in number as in the amount of money or support given.

Basically, the government policies do not go through any major changes during the ten years researched. They are expanded quite a lot, especially in the field of work-family balance, but this expansion is mainly within tax-based policies. There is no change when it comes to policies tackling societal norms and values. Furthermore, when looking at the underlying frames, there are no big changes to be found. Men are hardly ever the receivers of these policies and gender equality is never really touched upon within the policies as well. The three Basic Plans do see some change in the way they are structured and in what they see as causes of the low fertility rate. However, the underlying frames once again do not see a lot of change. Only the Second Plan touches upon gender equality but does so in a very general way.

6. Implications

This final chapter will put the findings from the Analysis into a broader context. First summarising the conclusions from chapter 5, it will then explain these conclusions in the context of political motherhood. To strengthen the argument, two more examples will be discussed, as well as criticism on the government policies. Finally, although this is not a policy recommendation paper, a simple recommendation will be discussed on the basis of these findings.

6.1 Conclusions from the Analysis

So, what can be concluded from the preceding analysis? Firstly, there is a big mismatch between the diagnosis and prognosis. What can be clearly seen from the analysis above, is that many frames present in the diagnosis do not appear in the prognosis. Most notably, frames related to gender equality, such as *Equal Opportunities* and *Reconciliation* were not adequately translated to a suitable prognosis. Most important in the prognosis, actually, is the heavy focus on economic factors, through the frames of *Focus on the Labour Market* and *Economic Burdens*. Even the *Reconciliation* frame, although it mentions gender equality in the diagnosis, is from the point of view of labour market exigencies in the prognosis. Furthermore, all of the minor frames were only found in the diagnosis. This means that within the prognosis, there is an extreme focus on the three major frames only.

It is hard to point out clear reasons as to why there is such a mismatch between the diagnosis and prognosis. Other researches using Critical Frame Analysis have not questioned this mismatch further and as this mismatch is not the focus of this research, one can only speculate as to why it has come to be. A potential explanation, however very pessimistic, could be the enduring nature of the patriarchy. This is the explanation used by Windebank as to why West-European political motherhood preferred traditional family relations at home: “The fact that the need of capitalism for women in the workforce has not undermined patriarchal relations in the home can be seen as evidence of this state of affairs” (Windebank 1999, 23). This argument could explain why there is such a mismatch between the diagnosis and prognosis: the patriarchal system in Korea is stronger than anticipated when the 5-year plans were made and thus, the Korean government cannot actually enact these policies as they face too much criticism from the society.

A more plausible explanation has already been mentioned in chapter 3, is that the Korean government makes the most changes in areas where employers did not show resistance and these changes are mainly tax-based (Fleckenstein and Lee 2014, 622). This means that the government is very careful in making its policies, which could explain the mismatch. Whereas the diagnosis is mainly meant to appease voters, the prognosis actually affects businesses as well. In order to not offset employers, the government has made many maternity policies in their service, rather than in the service of mothers. However, both of these explanations warrant further research.

A second observation is that the frames found in the policy documents do not necessarily match the causes for the low fertility rate as mentioned in chapter 3. Economic concerns are some of the major reasons cited by scholars and Koreans themselves for postponing the birth rate. These concerns seem to be addressed quite well within the policies, as the government has aimed to put in place many different subsidies to alleviate these troubles. Although many women and men mention the fear of losing their job after giving birth and job instability before giving birth as reasons to postpone childbearing, these particular concerns are not addressed by maternity policies. Only the reintegration of women after giving birth is touched upon. Of course, the government has done a lot to improve job stability over the last few years, even though the current Moon government receives quite some criticism on its labour policies (Bahk 2019). However, it is not seen as part of the maternity policies, but rather as a separate problem and thus policies to improve job stability for young people and young couples are treated separately by the government. This causes a mismatch between the diagnosis and prognosis within the maternity policies. The diagnosis does often mention job insecurity, but the prognosis never does.

Another often-mentioned cause for childbirth postponement is the high costs associated with childcare. Even though childcare-related problems and solution are present in both the diagnosis and the prognosis, the amount of childcare provided is not adequate and the quality is seen as not good enough. State-run day-care centres are

limited, and private childcare institutions often cost more than the state allowance (Lee, C. 2018). Some of the reconciliation-related problems as mentioned in academic research are also addressed by government policies, to an extent. The government has many programs in place to encourage women to go back to work after giving birth. However, most reconciliation-related policies are in service of labour market policies. The focus on the labour market is in line with the government's worries about an ageing society, but this extreme focus is hardly articulated in the academic research on the causes of the low birth rate in Korea

Besides these economic burdens described above, most causes mention in chapter 3 are not addressed by the Korean government in both the diagnosis and the prognosis. One often-mentioned cause relates to the *Reconciliation* frame, that is, the unequal burden of sharing household tasks between men and women. Although this is mentioned once in the diagnosis, namely in the Second Plan, it is never translated to the prognosis. As mentioned, childbearing has been suppressed because families, and especially women, are having a hard time reconciling the contradictions between the demands of the labour market and the cultural expectations that mothers have to be full-time caregivers. However, these cultural expectations are not dealt with at all. They are only briefly mentioned in the diagnosis (with, once again, a focus on the labour market) and never in the prognosis. The government's policies are not trying to alter either the demands of the labour market nor cultural expectations. Rather, it is

trying to get women back to work, without actually examining what women want to see changed in order to go back to work again.

Thirdly, the Korean government does not have an official statement on what it sees as the ideal family. However, from this frame analysis, an image of the ideal family can be deducted. Firstly, the Korean government promotes heterosexual marriage, as same-sex marriage is not officially allowed. Secondly, as there are numerous multiple-child policies, the Korean government prefers families that have more than two or even three children. As to the duties of the parents, the policy documents do promote both parents working, but as will be further explained in chapter 6.2, it also implicitly promotes the mother as the main care-giver.

Fourthly, gender equality is suspiciously absent from the diagnosis and prognosis. Although it is often mentioned within academic research and online as one of the major causes for the low fertility rate, this is not translated into the policy documents at all. The diagnosis does make some mention of gender inequality, but as mentioned in the preceding chapter, the three plans do not provide an adequate analysis of the gender inequality problem. Therefore, a matching prognosis is missing. The only policies that touch upon gender equality do so in relation to work-life reconciliation problems, and thus, gender equality is only discussed in relation to the labour market.

Overall, men are hardly treated as part of the low fertility rate problem. They are only sparingly mentioned in terms of gender relations within the diagnosis and within the prognosis, the only policies applicable to men directly, are those concerning paternity and parental leave. This shows a close similarity with European family policies, as researched by the official MAGEEQ research. As Verloo (2007, 126) mentions: “Overall, documents on family policies are rather gender-blind. Apart from ideas articulated by feminist voices, on the whole men are not part of the issue to be tackled and prevailing gender relations are not put into question.” Women share the burden in both the diagnosis and the prognosis. This means that women are seen as the people who hold the problem and the people that hold the solution. This places a huge responsibility on women in contrast to men, who are seen as neither the problem-holder nor solution-holder. Women and men are only seen as a family unit when the government talks about subsidies for newlyweds. However, when talking about reconciling work and family life, the family is not seen as a unit.

Prevailing gender relations are not really put into question. Rather, they are presented as an observation of how society works, and thusly accepted as a societal norm. This is confirmed by the fact that all policies on work-family reconciliation focus on how *women* can reconcile work and family life better, not on how *families as a whole* can do this. This means that the government still see women as the primary caretakers of children and men as the primary breadwinners in the family. The policies and accompanying 5-year plans lack a holistic approach to gender relations that would

tackle the complicated, interconnected causes that create inequality between men and women and thusly affect the fertility rate decline. As Windebank (1999, 23) mentioned as well: “It remains the mothers’, not the state’s, and not the father’s job to maintain the complex and sometimes fragile balance of child care arrangements which ensure the well-being in every respect of the child amongst both sets of women.”

6.2 Political Motherhood

From the frames above, what can be said about messages about the duties of motherhood that the government sends out through its birth rate boosting policies? Most importantly, the extreme absence of gender equality within the policy documents as discussed above, shows that the government is not willing to change the current prevailing gender relations and thus accepts and even encourages a traditional family model. Its focus on women, and women alone, without ever coming up with policies to address current gender relations, show that the government still prefers a traditional family model, with the woman having primary caring duties for the child. The fact that the government does not consider or implement any policies to spread out the caring duties more evenly between husband and wife reinforces this.

At first glance, it might seem contradicting that the government policies implicitly promote a traditional family model, whereas they explicitly promote the entrance of women into the labour market after giving birth. This contradiction,

however, can be explained. As mentioned, many Korean women see their exit from the labour market after giving birth as one of the main reasons for postponing childbirth. As family policies have been shaped by their political context – namely Korean parties trying to win over younger voters – both the centre-left government of Roh and the conservative governments of Lee and Park have expanded their family policies to appeal to a broader electoral base. Furthermore, the Korean government also sees the need to have women in the labour force, as firstly, the labour force is declining, and secondly, as feminist forces grow stronger in Korea, more women expect to be able to be in the labour force without explicit discrimination.

Because of all the factors above, the government has pursued policies that promote the (re-)entry of women into the labour market. On its own not a bad idea but combined with the fact that the government does both not assess the gender relations within the labour market and within the home in the form of unpaid housework nor tries to change them through policies, the government sends out an implicit message of traditional family relations as well. Although having to quit one's job after giving birth was one of the reasons women were postponing childbirth, getting women into the labour market is only part of the solution. The government has not adequately researched why women feel the pressure to quit their job. The labour market is only one side of the problem, with the other side being the societal expectations of taking care of the house tasks weighing down on a woman.

When it comes to childcare, the provision of childcare has risen extremely since 2004. No longer are only low-income families covered, but childcare is now available for all families. The government gives out lots of subsidies as well. However, the Korean government has still not taken away a lot of responsibility from Korean mothers as it has done nothing to discourage men's free-riding behaviour when it comes to unpaid housework. This puts a lot of pressure onto women, as they both need to re-enter the labour market as well as take care of the house tasks as well. Interestingly, already in a research in 2004, Won and Pascall came to the same conclusion when they noted that childcare policies before 2004 showed "the Korean welfare regime as expecting mothers to join the labour market, while holding deeply traditional Confucian assumptions about gender relations" (Won and Pascall 2004, 286). Despite the huge advancement of family policies since then, the same conclusion can still be drawn.

Furthermore, as the dominant frames show, the government does not really make policies from the view of and in service of mothers and families. Rather, it makes these policies in service of the labour market. The minor frames found, all in the diagnosis, also emphasize the idea that the government's policies were not made with women and families in mind. Many of the causes for the low birth rate researched in the diagnosis are under-researched and not properly analysed.

The image the government thus sends out to mothers through their policies is one that says both that women should go back to work, but that they also should take care of the housework. The family is not treated as a unit. Rather, women are the only ones responsible for the low birth rate and it is their job to raise it again. To sum up, “the package of measures deployed by the state to mould mothering” can be characterized by two things mainly: implicit enforcement of traditional gender relations within the family and a strong focus on the labour market whilst ignoring gender inequality issues. Korean political motherhood can thus be characterized as gendered familistic political motherhood. This correlates closely to two quotes from the introduction: “The government policies are based on this simplistic assumption that ‘if we give more money, people would have more children’” (SCMP 2018) and “the government sees birthrates just as a woman’s problem” (Sposato 2017). This shows that the public is also aware of this implicit bias.

6.3 Government Programs

There are other examples that reinforce this image. The government has also implemented programs, not policies, to raise the birth rate during the period researched. These programs have often received a huge backlash from the public. As programs are not the focus of this research, but they do contribute to the argument presented above, only two examples will be given here.

Firstly, one of the most controversial programs implemented was the Birth Map under the Park government in 2016. The government uploaded a website on which a map of Korea was published, which ranked towns by the number of women of childbearing age they contained. The map contained different shades of pink to indicate differences between regions (Sposato 2017). The map thus showed where there were a lot of women that could give birth and where there were little. Effectively, the map portrayed women's bodies as properties of the state. "I felt so angered that it blatantly showed how the government saw women's bodies as the country's reproductive tools, not that belonging to the woman," said one commentary (The Guardian 2016). Furthermore, the map conveys the idea that the low birth rate can simply be solved if men just find those women that would be able to bear children, blatantly disregarding the actual underlying causes of the low birth rate. The government said the map was meant to promote competition between regions, but the site was taken down the same day after a strong backlash. The Birth Map shows how the government sees the birth rate mainly as a problem for women and underlines the traditional family model that is also implicitly conveyed through its policies.

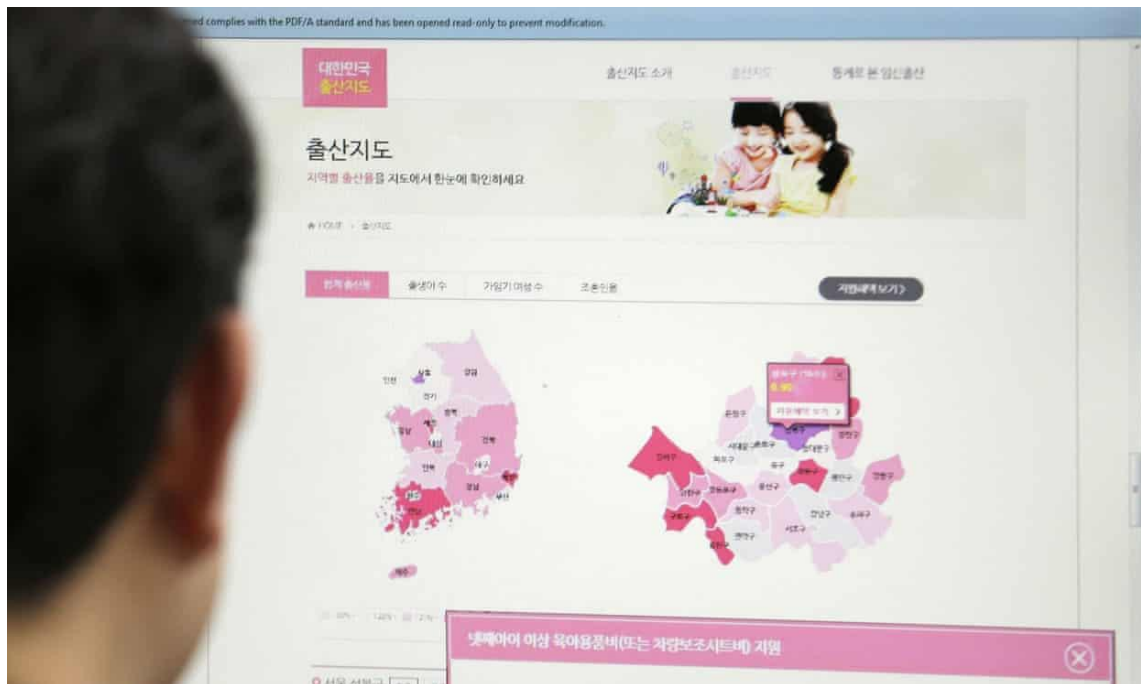


Figure 10: The Birth Map. *The Guardian* 2016.

Another example of another contested government program is the 2016 campaign, also under the Park government, for workers to leave their job without bidding farewell to their boss (Lee 2016). It is part of Korean culture for employees to either stay until their boss leaves or greet them when leaving the company themselves. However, many employees have noted that when they leave before their boss does, their boss usually gives them more work or express displeasure. The campaign was meant to address the work-life imbalance by making it easier for employees to leave their jobs earlier. However, as many commentaries mentioned, the government program is naïve and shows that the government does not have a proper understanding

of the underlying causes for the low birth rate. Leaving without saying goodbye, would not sit well with most bosses and would be even more cause for them to discriminate on workers with a family.

6.4 Criticisms

The government's 5-year plans and their policies have received quite some criticism. Some has been described in section 6.3 already, as well as in the introduction. Although some of the critiques are very specific, for example regarding the provision of childcare, most critiques actually target a more global theme: the absence of gender inequality-related maternity policies. As mentioned by Choi (2006) in her commentary on the Second Plan, the government fails to pay attention to the unequal social structure and barriers to female employment. She argues that the main factor influencing the fertility rate is the participation of women in the labour market and the main factor that affect this participation is gender equality. She mentions that the government's 5-year plan's biggest problem is that its analysis of the causes of the low fertility rate is too superficial, which leads to the plan undervaluing the importance of gender equality.

Another example of criticism on the government's 5-year plans relates closely to this article. Many commentators see employment discrimination, gender imbalance within the home, and career interruption as the main reasons for the low fertility rate,

but these reasons are not addressed by the government's plans or policies. Most commentators argue that the government's 5-year plans present an overly simplistic examination of the causes of the low birth rate, glossing over those factors which are deemed most important by the public. Commentators often point towards countries that have managed to raise the fertility rate through promoting gender equality within the workplace: "In a country with a total fertility rate of over 1.5 children, there is no career interruption or employment discrimination, and the state fully supports child rearing" (합계 출산율이 1.5 명 이상인 나라에서는 여성이 아이를 낳아도 경력단절이나 고용차별이 없고 국가가 자녀 양육을 전적으로 지원하기 때문에 믿고 아이를 낳는 것"이라고 강조했다) (MK 2015).

6.5 Policy Recommendations

Even though this research is not a policy recommendation paper, nor did it originally intend to give any policy advice, with the knowledge accumulated above a short policy recommendation should not be skipped. As is proven by research, countries that prefer more traditional family behaviour, such as Korea, have the lowest fertility rate, whereas countries with greater diversity in their family dynamics, such as Northern-European countries, have higher fertility (Billari and Kohler 2004). "Evidently, in a context that confines childbearing to conservative family forms, there always will be a fraction of the population that tries to avoid getting trapped in such a life situation" (Andersson 2013, 12). According to this strand of research, in order for the fertility rate

to be raised, the government should not encourage traditional family structures, such as the male-breadwinner model, but rather should encourage diversity within the families.

As has been empirically researched by Won (2016, 161), “findings show that the contribution of policy towards the reported satisfaction in work-family balance is not supported, while the set of gender stereotypes is found to be a negative contributor.” This means that the Korean government should make gender equality one of its main focus areas when it comes to maternity policies. Won’s empirical study, interviewing both Korean mothers and Korean policymakers, shows that the policies that have been enacted over the last few years have a negative contribution, if anything, on women’s satisfaction in their work-life balance.

MacDonald (2000) has shown that a persistent focus on gender equality in public and private life – meaning within society, within the workplace and within the family – seems to be the best strategy for policymakers. This could create an environment in which childbearing and -rearing is not seen as a step towards reduced personal freedom by women. As Lewis and Guillari (2006, 184) have already mentioned: “choices are made in the context of gendered inequalities in power relations, in all their economic, political and discursive manifestations, which skew the interdependency of men and women’s individual capabilities sets at the household level.” The Korean government should start to realize that the policies it is currently

pursuing will not be as effective as they had hoped because they do nothing to address the inequality that contributes to the decreasing fertility rate.

One of the main things that the Korean government should do, is making policies appropriate to Korea's cultural heritage. Many of the policies implemented have been adopted from European countries that have a vastly different history of family relations (Won 2016, 162). Leave arrangements, for example, have been imported from Nordic European countries that have a social democratic gender regime. However, as Korea has a family-focused conservative gender regime, these policies do not necessarily fit the cultural context. If the Korean government really wants to raise the fertility rate, it should start focusing on solving the dichotomy between the public and the private. To do so, it should start incorporating men into their policies as well. As men are largely absent in current policies, making policies that target men specifically or that target the family as a unit would be a great first step in going towards more gender equality within the family.

Above all, the Korean government should realise that policies do not only reflect existing societal norms and values. Rather, policies have the power to lead society into new social norms. The government has the power to – slowly, gradually – change the societal norms that create such a difficult contradiction for women between the pressure to participate in the labour market and the cultural expectations that they have to be a full-time caregiver.

7. Conclusion and Limitations

The Korean government has been actively trying to combat the decreasing fertility rate and birth rate through pro-natalist policies since 2005. Through expanded childcare subsidies, extended parental leave program, and expanded healthcare subsidies, the government has tried to entice mothers and families to get more babies. However, the policies have not been effective so far as the Korean fertility rate is currently at its lowest at 0.98 babies per woman. Moreover, an often-heard complaint is that government policies only see the problems surrounding the low fertility rate as a woman's problem and that it does not promote an image of motherhood that appeals to women. This research has aimed to contribute to this last statement by doing a Critical Frame Analysis of policies documents between 2007 and 2016 to uncover which images the government policies convey.

The Critical Frame Analysis has shown the presence of three major frames: *Reconciliation*, *Focus on the Labour Market* and *Economic Burden*. This means that the Korean government mainly focuses on these three problems within both their diagnosis of the problem and their prognosis. *Focus on the Labour Market* is strongly intertwined with the other two major frames, meaning that the government makes a lot of policies in service of the labour market. Furthermore, within the *Reconciliation* frame, women are the main receivers of the policies, whereas men are largely absent from the analysis.

When it comes to *Gender Equality*, this frame is largely absent from the policy documents. Whereas it is perceived as one of the major causes of the low fertility rate by most academic sources, the government hardly touches upon this problem. Most academic sources show that for women the contradiction between the demands of the labour market and cultural expectations to stay at home and take care of the children is one of the major causes of the low fertility rate. However, this is never touched upon in the policies. Gender equality is never at the heart of family policies and when it is touched upon, it is always in regard to the labour market.

In general, the Critical Frame Analysis uncovered quite a big mismatch between the government's diagnosis and prognosis. Although the 5-year plans mention gender equality-related problems, such as the unequal sharing of household burdens, as one of the causes of the low birth rate, it is not properly translated to a matching policy. Furthermore, other causes, such as job instability and conservative cultural expectations, do not find a policy translation at all.

As mentioned, the Korean government seems to be sending out messages regarding motherhood and its duties that do not correspond to women's own opinions. The image the government conveys through its policies to mould mothering is also characterized as 'political motherhood.' Through the Critical Frame Analysis, Korean political motherhood can be characterized by an implicit focus on the traditional male-

breadwinner, female-caregiver family model. This can be seen through the fact that the government does not seek to change existing gender-relations, showing that it prefers the traditional family model. This is combined with an explicit focus on the reintegration of women into the labour market, which is done without addressing which forces keep them out in the first way. Also, men are largely absent in the policy documents. Korean political motherhood is thus characterized as gendered familistic political motherhood.

Thus, the policies implemented by the government give off quite a tough message for mothers. “Go back to work after giving birth! But don’t forget, you should also take care of the household tasks and of your child!” Rather than lowering the pressure on mothers, the government’s policies add even more pressure. Without adequate research on the mechanisms at work that actually lower the fertility rate and a proper analysis of the gender inequality that keeps families from childbearing, the government’s policies will not be effective.

Whereas this research did show the frames present in Korean pronatalist policy, it did not show how these frames get interpreted by the policy-receivers, how they are used by political actors, or how they originated. Further analysis is required to uncover these facets of policy framing. Especially their influence on the public would be interesting to show. This research has only shown a correlation between the frames found and often-heard criticism on the policies. Research similar to Won (2016), who

uses interviews to uncover satisfaction with work-life balance, could be interesting and beneficial to see how these policies are interpreted.

Another interesting area to explore would be what the Korean government sees as the ideal family. From the framing analysis presented above, a simple image can be construed of the ideal Korean family according to the government. The Korean government prefers a family that consists of a husband and wife, with multiple children. A more detailed analysis of policy documents focusing on this particular issue could uncover a more detailed image of the ideal family.

A final area for further research, already touched upon in chapter 6, would be why there is such a mismatch between the diagnosis and prognosis. It would be interesting to see why the 5-year plans have not found an adequate translation into policies. The causes of these can be sought in cultural reasons, such as the enduring nature of the patriarchy, as well as in political reasons, such as potential gains and losses by politicians and lawmakers.

The major contribution of this research lies in its ability to identify the underlying message policies send out, albeit implicitly. Knowing which messages policies send out is extremely important for the government, as they might send out message that are counterproductive to the goal they want to reach. In the Korean case, this research uncovered that the policies send out a message that puts extra pressure on

women, as underlying gender inequality issues are not targeted. As is proven by other scholars, policies that promote more diverse families are more effective in raising the fertility rate. The Korean government should take note of this and change its policies accordingly.

The centre-left Moon government has aimed to change the fertility rate policies a lot since its start in 2017. Not all policies have been received well: in 2018 it expanded cash incentives to the richest 10% of society as well, which received a lot of criticism (Kotecki 2018). However, its most recent policy change shows some promise: president Moon has focused on “showing respect for women” (South China Morning Post 2019). This includes extended paternity leave and mothers being able to give their baby their last name. Furthermore, the Moon government also focuses on support for non-traditional families such as single-parent households and unmarried couples. It has even announced campaigns to encourage more men to participate in childcare and household chores.

Although it will take some time for these policies to filter through into Korea’s conservative society, it is a great first step. It seems that the Moon government has realized that the government policies mould mothering in more ways than the eye can see. In order to make policies that really have an effect on the fertility rate, the Korean government should research how family policies have a practical and ideological effect motherhood through exploring the concept of political motherhood.

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Appendix 1

MAGEEQ Methodology of Critical Frame Analysis

SUPER-TEXT TEMPLATE

NUMBER/CODE/ TITLE (max 20 signs)

- Full title
- (In English and in original language)
- Country/Place
- Issue
- Date
- Type/status of document
- Actor(s) and gender of actor(s) if applicable
- Audience
- Event/reason/occasion of appearance
- Parts of text eliminated

Voice

- Voice(s) speaking
- Perspective
- References: words/concepts (and where they come from)
- References: actors
- References: documents

Diagnosis

- What is represented as the problem?
- Why is it seen as a problem?
- Causality (what is seen as a cause of what?)
- Dimensions of gender (social categories/identity/behavior/norms & symbols/institutions)
- Intersectionality
- Mechanisms (resources/norms & interpretations/legitimization of violence)
- Form (argumentation/style/conviction techniques/dichotomies/ metaphors/contrasts)
- Location (organization of labor/organization of intimacy/organization of citizenship)

Attribution of roles in diagnosis

- Causality (who is seen to have made the problem?)
- Responsibility (who is seen as responsible for the problem?)
- Problem holders (whose problem is it seen to be?)
- Normativity (what is a norm group if there is a problem group?)
- Active/passive roles (perpetrators/victims, etc.)
- Legitimization of non-problem(s)

Prognosis

- What to do?
- Hierarchy/priority in goals

- How to achieve goals (strategy/means/instruments)?
- Dimensions of gender (social categories/identity/behavior/norms & symbols/institutions)
- Intersectionality
- Mechanisms (resources/norms & interpretations/violence)
- Form (argumentation/style/conviction techniques/dichotomies/ metaphors)
- Location (organization of labor/intimacy/citizenship)

Attribution of roles in prognosis

- Call for action and non-action (who should [not] do what?)
- Who has voice in suggesting suitable course of action?
- Who is acted upon? (target groups)
- Boundaries set to action
- Legitimization of (non)action

Normativity

- What is seen as good?
- What is seen as bad?
- Location of norms in the text (diagnosis/prognosis/elsewhere)

Balance

- Emphasis on different dimensions/elements
- Frictions or contradictions within dimensions/elements

Appendix 2

Data Overview

5-year Plans

Summary of the First Plan for Low Birth Rate and Ageing Society (제 1 차 저출산

고령사회기본계획). By Jointly Related Ministries (관계부처 합동). July

2006. Available from:

[http://www.mohw.go.kr/m/common/board_file_dn.jsp?BOARD_ID=140&CO
NT_SEQ=38425&FILE_SEQ=17167](http://www.mohw.go.kr/m/common/board_file_dn.jsp?BOARD_ID=140&CO
NT_SEQ=38425&FILE_SEQ=17167)

Second Plan for Low Birth Rate and Ageing Society (제 2 차 저출산

고령사회기본계획). By Jointly Related Ministries (관계부처 합동). October

2010. Available from:

[http://www.mohw.go.kr/react/modules/download.jsp?BOARD_ID=5731&CO
NT_SEQ=306573&FILE_SEQ=156986](http://www.mohw.go.kr/react/modules/download.jsp?BOARD_ID=5731&CO
NT_SEQ=306573&FILE_SEQ=156986)

Third Plan for Low Birth Rate and Ageing Society (제 3 차 저출산

고령사회기본계획). By Jointly Related Ministries (관계부처 합동).

December 2015. Available from:

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Korean Abstract

한국의 출산율은 1960년대부터 지속적으로 감소해 2018년 최저점을 기록했으며 이때의 출산율은 여성 1명당 0.98명이다. 많은 여성들은 출산 연기 주요 원인으로 고용 불안, 육아와 관련된 높은 비용지출, 성 불평등, 가사 분배의 불공평성 등을 이유로 언급하고 있다. 낮은 출산율은 국가, 특히 경제분야에 있어서 다양한 문제를 야기하기 때문에, 한국 정부는 수많은 정책을 통해 출산율을 높이려고 노력해 왔다. 한국의 출산정책은 2005년부터 대대적으로 확대됐고, 특히 육아보조금 분야는 더욱 확대되었다. 하지만 아직까지도 이러한 정책들의 실효성이 부족하다는 비판이 많은 가운데 장차 미래 어머니들의 기대와 요구조건에 부합하는 모성의 이미지를 반영하지 못하고 있다는 지적이 많다.

모성을 형성하기 위해 정부가 도입한 정책과 이에 따라 전달되는 이미지 역시 정치적 모성으로 특정된다. 정치적 모성이란, 정부가 모성의 의무에 대한 메시지를 직접적으로 혹은 간접적으로 여성에게 전달하면서 어머니로서

여성들이 경험하는 바를 구조화하는 것을 의미한다. 본 연구는 2007 년부터 2016 년까지의 정부 정책 자료를 분석하여 한국의 정치적 모성애를 탐구하였다. 이 연구작업은 정부 정책 자료에 있는 정책 프레임을 발굴하기 위해 Critical Frame Analysis 를 활용하여 수행했다.

이 연구는 정책 자료 상 존재하는 세 가지의 주요한 프레임을 발견했다. 첫째, 한국 정부는 여성들이 출산 후 노동시장에 다시 진출할 수 있도록 하는 프로그램을 시행함으로써 일과 가정의 양립에 많은 초점을 맞추고 있다. 둘째로, 대부분의 정책은 노동 시장에 초점을 두고 만들어진다. 마지막으로, 많은 예비 부모들이 출산 연기 원인으로 지적하는 경제적 부담을 상쇄하는 것에 집중되어 있다. 흥미롭게도, 이러한 정책의 프레임에는 성평등에 대한 접근이 거의 존재하지 않았다. 많은 학자들이 불공평한 성평등을 저출산율의 원인으로 보고 있음에도 불구하고, 문제의 진단과 이를 위해 도입된 정책적 해결책 모두 성 불평등을 문제로 다루지 않는다. 더군다나, 여성들이 이러한 해결책 정책의 주요

수혜자로 되었는데, 남성들은 가족 정책의 대상으로 보여지고 있지 않다. 이러한 점은 정부가 저출산율의 문제를 단지 여성만의 문제로 보고 있다는 것을 뜻한다.

이 연구는 한국 정부가 정책 내에서 성 불평등을 해소하지 않고 있음을 지적하며, 한국 정부가 여성은 안사람, 남성은 바깥양반이라는 전통적인 가족 구조를 유도하는 암묵적인 메시지를 전달함으로써 모성을 형성하고있다고 결론지었다. 게다가, 이러한 모성의 이미지는 노동시장에서 여성이 빠져나오게 되는 주요 원인들 중 하나인 가사 과제의 불공평한 분배를 다루지 않고, 여성의 노동시장 재진입만을 강조해 여성에게 더 많은 압박을 가한다. 그러므로, 한국의 정치적 모성은 성 불평등적인 가족주의적 정치적 모성으로 특징지을 수 있다. 정부의 정책이 효과적이지 않은 이유 중 하나가 성 불평등을 해결하지 않은 것에 기반한다는 것을 인지해야 한다.